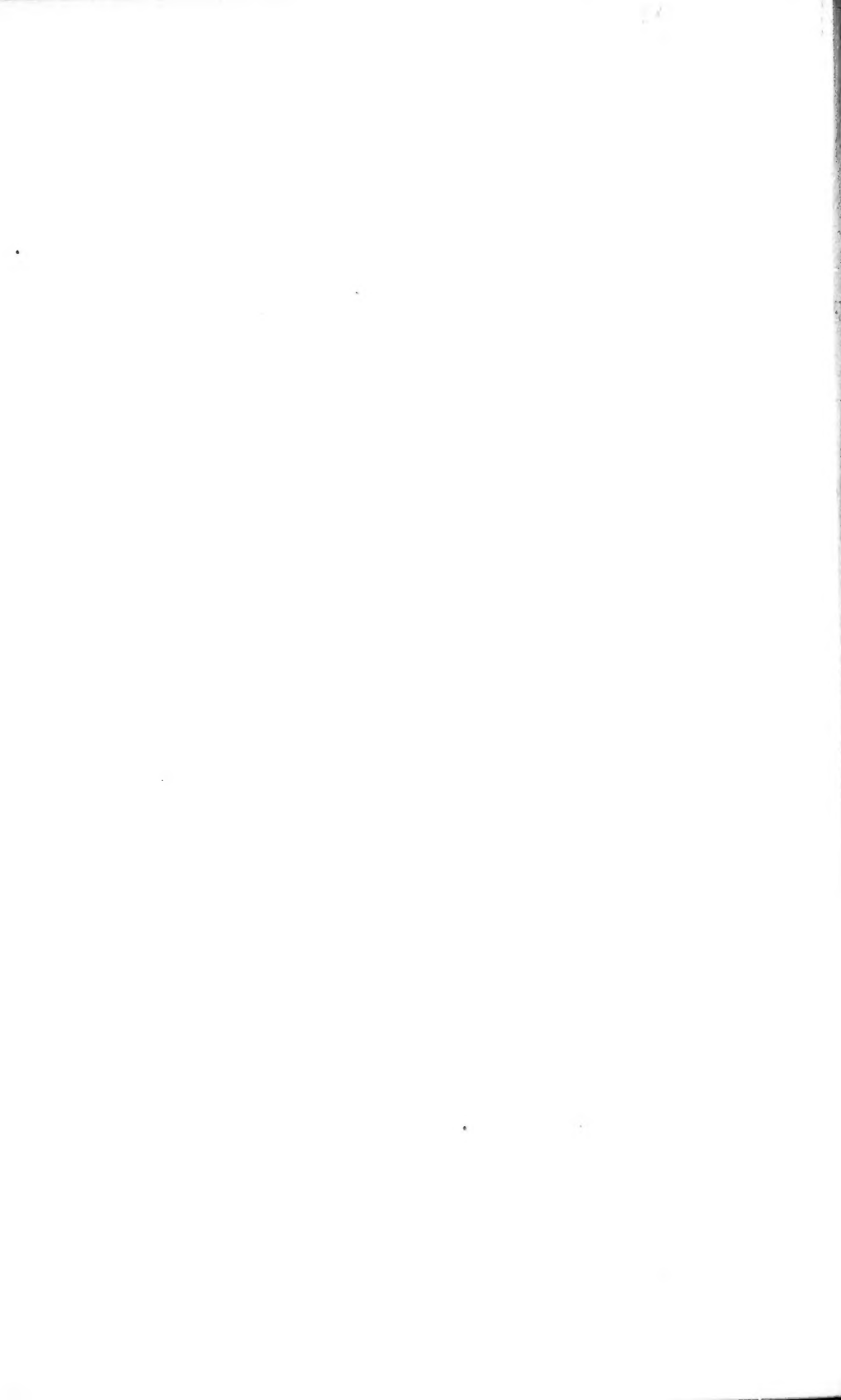




For dear Mother,
With love and kindest remembrance

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THE SCALLYWAG

BY

GRANT ALLEN

AUTHOR OF

'THE TENTS OF SHEM,' 'IVAN GREET'S MASTERPIECE,' ETC.



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THE SCALLYWAG

CHAPTER I.

IN WINTER QUARTERS.

‘FOR my part,’ said Armitage, ‘I call him a scallywag.’

‘What is a scallywag?’ Nea Blair asked, looking up at him from her seat with inquiring wonder.

Armitage paused a moment, and perused his boots. It’s so hard on a fellow to be pounced upon like that for a definition off-hand.

‘Well, a scallywag,’ he answered, leaning his back, for moral support, against the big eucalyptus-tree beside which he stood, ‘a scallywag, I should say, well—well, is—

why, he's the sort of man, you know, you wouldn't like to be seen walking down Piccadilly with.'

'Oh, I see!' Nea exclaimed, with a bright little laugh. 'You mean, if you were walking down Piccadilly yourself in a frock-coat and shiny tall hat, with an orchid from Bull's stuck in your button-hole! Then I think, Mr. Armitage, I rather like scallywags.'

Madame Ceriolo brought her eyes (and eyeglasses) back from space, where they had been firmly fixed on a point in the heavens at an infinite distance, and ejaculated in mild and solemn surprise: 'But why, my dear Nea?'

'Oh, because, Madame, scallywags are always by far the most interesting people in the world. They're so much more likely to be original and amusing than all the rest of us. Artists and authors, for example, are almost always scallywags.'

'What a gross libel on two liberal professions!' Armitage put in, with a shocked expression of face.

He dabbled in water-colours as an amateur himself, and therefore considered he was

very nearly implicated in this wholesale condemnation of Art and Literature.

‘As far as I’m concerned,’ Madame Ceriolo said with angelic softness, rearranging her *pince-nez*, ‘I hate originality. And I’m not very fond of artists or authors. Why should people wish to be different from their fellow-Christians?’

‘Who is it you’re calling a scallywag, any way?’ Isabel Boyton asked from her seat beyond with her clear American accent.

If Madame Ceriolo was going to start an abstract discussion on an ethical question of wide extent, Isabel meant, with Philadelphian practicality, to nail her down at once to the matter in hand, and resolutely resist all attempts at digression.

‘Why, this new man, Gascoyne,’ Armitage drawled out in answer, annexing a vacant chair just abandoned by a fat old Frenchman in the background by the *café*, and seating himself opposite them.

‘It’s a good name—Gascoyne,’ Nea suggested quietly.

‘Yes, indeed,’ Miss Boyton echoed, with

American promptitude. 'A first-rate name. I've read it in a history-book.'

'But a good name doesn't count for much nowadays,' Madame Ceriolo interposed, and then straightway repented her. Anybody can assume a good name, of course; but surely *she* was the last person on earth who ought to have called attention, just then, to the facility of the assumption. For did she not print a countess's coronet on top of her own card on no better title? and was not her vogue in Rivieran society entirely due to her personal assertion of her relationship to the Ceriolos of Castel Ceriolo, in the Austrian Tyrol?

'Well, he's a nice-looking young fellow enough,' Nea added, pleading his cause with warmth, for she had committed herself to Mr. Gascoyne's case now, and she was quite determined he should have an invitation.

'Besides, we're awfully short of gentlemen,' Isabel Boyton put in sharply. 'I haven't seen him, but a man's a man. I don't care whether he is a scallywag or not, I mean to go for him.' And she jotted down the name on her list at once, without

waiting to hear Madame Ceriolo for the prosecution.

It was seasonable weather at Mentone, for the 20th of December. The sky was as cloudlessly blue as July, and from the southern side of the date - palms on the Jardin Public, where they all sat basking in the warm rays of the sun, the great jagged peaks of the bare mountains in the rear showed distinct and hard against a deep sapphire background. A few hundred feet below the summit of one of the tallest and most rugged, the ruined walls of the Saracen fortress of Sant' Agnese just caught the light; and it was to that airy platform that Nea and Isabel proposed their joint picnic for the twenty-fourth—the day before Christmas. And the question under debate at that particular moment was simply this—who should be invited by the two founders of the feast? each alternately adding a name to her own list, according to fancy.

‘Well, if *you* take Mr. Gascoyne,’ Nea said, with a faint air of disappointment at losing her guest, ‘*I* shall take Mr. Thistle-ton.’

And she proceeded to inscribe him.

‘But, Nea, my dear,’ Madame Ceriolo broke in with an admirable show of maternal solicitude, ‘who *is* Mr. Gascoyne, and who *is* Mr. Thistleton? I think we ought to make sure of that. I haven’t even heard their names before. Are they in society?’

‘Oh, they’re all right, I guess,’ Isabel Boyton answered briskly, looking up much amused. ‘Mamma was talking to them on the promenade yesterday, and she says she apprehends Mr. Thistleton’s got money, and Mr. Gascoyne’s got brains if he ain’t got family. They can just come right along. Don’t you be afraid, madame.’

‘Your mamma’s opinion is *very* reassuring, no doubt,’ Madame Ceriolo continued dryly, as who liked not the security, and in a voice that half mimicked Isabel’s frank Americanism; ‘but still, as being in charge of dear Nea’s conduct and society while she remains at Mentone, I should prefer to feel certain, before we commit ourselves to inviting them, exactly who these young men are. The fact that they’re stopping at a decent hotel in the town is not in itself

sufficient. Such *very* odd people get into good hotels on the Riviera sometimes.'

And Madame Ceriolo, measuring Isabel through her eyeglasses with a stony stare, drew herself up with a poker down her back, in perfect imitation of the stereotyped British matronly exclusiveness.

The fact was, having accepted the post of chaperon - companion to Nea Blair for the winter, Madame Ceriolo was laudably anxious to perform her part in that novel capacity with strict propriety and attention to detail; but, never having tried her hand at the proprieties in her life before, and being desirous now of observing them to the utmost letter of the law—if anything, she rather over-did it than otherwise.

'Now, Mr. Armitage,' Nea said mischievously, 'it's you who're responsible for our original introduction to the scallywag and his friend. Speak up for their antecedents! You've got to account for your acquaintances to Madame.' And she drew a circle with her parasol on the gravel-path, as if to point the moral of the impossibilities of his ever escaping them.

‘Well, to begin with, they’re Oxford men,’ Armitage said, clearing his throat and looking dubiously about him. ‘They’re both of them Oxford men.’

Madame Ceriolo’s back relaxed somewhat. ‘Oh, Oxford men,’ she answered in an appeased voice. ‘That’s always something.’ Then, after a pause, under her breath, to herself, ‘Ja wohl, ja wohl ! C’est toujours quelque chose.’

It was part of Madame Ceriolo’s point, in fact, as a cosmopolitan and a woman of the world, that she always thought to herself in French or German, and translated aloud, as it were, into English. It called attention now and again in passing to what casual observers might otherwise have overlooked—her Tyrolese origin and her Parisian training.

‘And Gascoyne, the scallywag,’ Armitage went on reflectively, ‘appears to be a sort of tutor or something of the kind to the other one—Thistleton.’

Madame Ceriolo’s back collapsed altogether.

‘An Oxford tutor!’ she cried, smiling most genially. ‘Why, that’s quite respectable.

The pink of propriety. *Tout ce qu'il-y-a de plus comme il faut!* Nothing could be more proper.'

'I don't think he's exactly a tutor—not in the sense you mean,' Armitage continued hastily, afraid of guaranteeing the scallywag too far. 'I think he's merely come abroad for the vacation, you know, bringing this other young fellow along with him as a private pupil, to give him a few hours' reading and accompany him generally. I fancy he hasn't taken his own degree yet.'

'Then they're both of them students still?' Isabel Boyton interjected. 'Oh my! Ain't that nice! Two Oxford students! You always read in English books, you know, about students at Oxford.'

Armitage smiled.

'We don't call them students at Oxford or Cambridge, though, for obvious reasons,' he said, with British tolerance for Transatlantic ignorance; 'we know too well what they go there for, Miss Boyton, for that. We call them undergraduates.'

'Well, undergraduates, any way,' Isabel answered good-humouredly. She was ac-

customed to snubbing. 'It don't much matter what you call them, I guess, as long as they're men, and come from Oxford. Are you satisfied about them now in your own mind, Madame Ceriolo?'

Madame Ceriolo smiled her gracious little smile. She was as pretty and well preserved a woman of forty as you would wish to see across a *table d'hôte* at dinner any day.

'If they're really Oxford men, and your momma approves of them,' she replied, with just the faintest little undertone of malice, 'I'm sure they'll be an acquisition to Mentone society. Though I could wish that one of them was not a scallywag, if Mr. Armitage has explained the meaning of the name he applies to him correctly.'

'Chut!' Armitage murmured in a gentle undertone. 'Talk of the devil! — Here comes Thistleton!'

'We say in Austria, "Speak of an angel, and you hear the rustle of her wings,"' Madame answered demurely. 'C'est plus poli, notre proverbe à nous; n'est-ce pas, monsieur? And which is Thistleton? The pupil or the scallywag?'

‘The pupil,’ Armitage whispered in a flutter of uneasiness. ‘But take care—take care! He’ll see we’re talking of him.’

‘The pupil! C’est bien!’ Madame mused in reply. And in effect it *was* well; for experience and analogy led her to conclude that the pupil is usually richer in this world’s goods than his master or instructor.

‘Though, after all,’ Madame reflected to herself wisely, ‘it isn’t always the richest people, either, you can get most out of.’

Her reflections, however, philosophical as they might be, were cut short by the arrival of the pupil himself, whom Armitage advanced to greet with friendly right hand, and presented duly to the ladies of the party.

‘Madame Ceriolo, Miss Boyton, Miss Blair, Mr. Thistleton.’

The new-comer bowed. He was a blonde young man, tall, hearty, and athletic, with a complexion indicative of serious attention to beefsteak for breakfast, and he

wore a well-made knickerbocker suit that suggested unlimited credit at a West-end tailor's.

Madame Ceriolo cast her keen black eyes over him once from head to foot through those impassive glasses, and summed him up mentally at a glance to herself; manufacturing interest, rich, good-humoured, a fool with his money, strong, handsome, Britannic—the kind of young man, in fact, who, under other circumstances, it might have been well for a woman of the world to cultivate. But then, dear Nea! that excellent Mr. Blair; the Cornish rectory; her British respectability! Madame drew herself up once more at the thought and bowed stiffly.

‘Now, Nea, say, he’s yours; you’ve got to ask him,’ Isabel Boyton remarked, after the usual formalities of the weather report and the bill of health had been duly exchanged by either party. ‘The scal——’ She checked herself; even Transatlantic freedom of speech has its final limits. ‘Mr. Gascoyne’s mine, and Mr. Thistleton’s yours, you know. So fire away, there’s a

dear. "On Saturday next—the pleasure of your company."

'What is it?' the blonde young man asked with a good-humoured smile. 'Tennis, a hop, a dinner, a tea-fight?'

'Oh dear no! only a picnic, Mr. Thistle-ton,' Nea answered, blushing; a blush through that clear rich olive-dusky skin is so very becoming. 'Miss Boyton and I are stopping together at the Hôtel des Rives d'Or, and we've got up a little entertainment of our own——'

'With momma and Madame Ceriolo,' Isabel interposed promptly, to save the *convenances*.

'To Sant' Agnese on the hill-top there,' Nea went on, without noticing the interruption. 'It's on Saturday, the twenty-fourth, the day before Christmas. Are you and Mr. Gascoyne engaged for Saturday?'

'Now, you're asking *my* man, too,' Isabel put in, pretending to be vexed; 'and I was going to write him such a sweetly pretty invitation.'

'We're not engaged, as far as I'm concerned,' Thistleton answered, seating him-

self; 'I shall be awfully delighted. But I'm not so sure about Gascoyne, Miss Blair. He's such a shy sort of fellow, he won't go out. However, I'll convey Miss Boyton's message to him.'

'But the trouble is,' Isabel said, glancing seaward, 'that every man Jack of us is to go on a donkey.'

'And this meeting cordially recognises the principle,' Armitage put in from behind, 'that every man Jack of us, as Miss Boyton so charmingly phrases it, is to engage, provide, hire, and pay for his own animal.'

'Where's Sant' Agnese?' the blonde young man inquired, looking about him vaguely.

Armitage and Miss Boyton pointed it out together at once (of course in different places), and Armitage's, as a matter of fact, happened to be the right one. Such is the perversity of men, that they actually insist upon being usually accurate in these unimportant details.

'Why, I could hop that lot on one foot,' Thistleton exclaimed contemptuously. 'I'll walk, Miss Blair; I don't need any donkey.'

‘But you don’t understand,’ Armitage answered, smiling. ‘The point of this particular entertainment is that it’s to be fundamentally and essentially an exclusive donkey-picnic.’

‘For which reason, Mr. Armitage, we’ve included you in it,’ Isabel remarked parenthetically in a stage undertone.

Armitage severely ignored the cheap witticism. A man of culture can afford to ignore Pennsylvanian pleasantries.

‘And it would mar the harmony of the entertainment,’ he continued, as bland as ever, ‘if any of us were to insist on going up on our natural organs of locomotion.’

‘Meaning our legs,’ Nea added in explanation, for the blonde young man seemed helplessly involved in doubt as to Armitage’s meaning.

Isabel Boyton glanced down at the ground with modest coyness.

‘Limbs we say in Amurrica,’ she murmured half inaudibly to herself, with a rising blush.

‘We are all vertebrate animals,’ Armitage responded with cheerful ease. ‘Why

seek to conceal the fact? Well, you see, Thistleton, the joke is just this: we shall start some ten or fifteen donkey-power strong, all in a row, to scale the virgin heights of Sant' Agnese — is "virgin heights" permissible in America, Miss Boyton?—and if any one of us were ignobly to walk by the side, he'd be taking a mean advantage of all the remainder.'

'In short, we mean to make ourselves ridiculous in a lot,' Nea said, coming to the rescue: 'and none of us must be less ridiculous than the main body. You can't think what fun it is, Mr. Thistleton, and what a cavalcade we shall make, zigzagging up and down the mountain side like so many billy-goats! Why, fat old Mrs. Newton at our hotel's going to come on purpose, if she can get any donkey in Mentone strong enough to carry her.'

'The true philosopher,' Armitage observed sententiously, 'is never deterred from doing that which suits his own convenience by the consideration that he is at the same time affording an innocent amusement to other people.'

.

The blonde young man yielded with grace forthwith.

‘Oh, if it’s only a case of making myself ridiculous to please the company,’ he said with native good-humour, ‘I’m all there. It’s my usual attitude. I accept the donkey and the invitation. When and where do we start? We must have a rendezvous.’

‘At the Gare at ten sharp,’ Nea said, ticking him off on her list of the apprised. ‘And mind you order your donkeys well beforehand, for there’ll be a brisk demand. Every donkey in Mentone ’ll be in requisition for the picnic.’

Madame Ceriolo sighed. ‘What a character you’re giving us!’ she exclaimed lackadaisically. ‘But never mind, my child, *la jeunesse s’amusera.*’

And she looked as young and pretty herself when she smiled as a woman of forty can ever reasonably be expected to do.

CHAPTER II.

ROOM FOR THE HERO.

AN hour later the blonde young man pursued the even tenor of his way, assisted by a cigar and swinging a stout green orange stick in his hand, along the Promenade du Midi, the main lounge of Mentone, towards the Hôtel Continental. Arrived at the grand staircase of that palatial caravanseraï, the most fashionable in the town, he leapt lightly up three steps at a time into the entrance-hall, and calling out, 'Here, you, sir,' in his native tongue—for he was no linguist—to the boy at the lift, mounted hydraulically, whistling as he went, to the second story. There he burst into the neatly-furnished sitting-room, being a boisterous young man most heedless of

the conventions, and, flinging his hat on the table and himself into an easy-chair before the superfluous fire, exclaimed in a loud and jolly voice to his companion : ' I say, Gascoyne, here's games to the fore ! I've got an invitation for you.'

His friend looked up inquiringly. ' Who from ?' he asked, laying down his pen and rising from his desk to sun himself in the broad flood of light by the window.

' A pretty American,' Thistleton answered, knocking off his ash into the basket of olive-wood ; ' no end of a stunner !'

' But I don't know her,' Paul Gascoyne gasped out with a half-terrified look.

' So much the better,' his companion retorted imperturbably. ' If a lady falls over head and ears in love with you merely from seeing your manly form in the street without ever having so much as exchanged a single word with you, the compliment's a higher one, of course, than if she waited to learn all your virtues and accomplishments in the ordinary manner.'

' Dinner ?' Gascoyne asked, with a dubious glance towards his bedroom door.

He was thinking how far his evening apparel would carry him unaided.

‘No, not dinner ; a picnic next Saturday as ever was,’ Thistleton replied, all unconscious. ‘The ladies of the Rives d’Or invite us both to lunch with them on the green up yonder at Sant’ Agnese. It’s an awful lark, and the pretty American’s dying to see you. She says she’s heard so much about you——’

‘A picnic !’ Paul interposed, cutting him short at once, and distinctly relieved by learning of this lesser evil. ‘Well, I dare say I can let it run to a picnic. That won’t dip into much. But how did the ladies at the Rives d’Or ever come at all to cognise my humble existence ?’

Thistleton smiled an abstruse smile. ‘Why, Armitage told them, I suppose,’ he answered carelessly. ‘But do you really imagine, at the present time of day, my dear fellow, every girl in the place doesn’t know at once the name, antecedents, position, and prospects of every young man of marriageable age that by any chance comes into it ? Do you think they haven’t spotted

the fashionable intelligence that two real live Oxford men are stopping at the Continental? I should rather say so! Gascoyne, my boy, keep your eyes open. We've our price in the world. Mind you always remember it!

Paul Gascoyne smiled uneasily. 'I wish I could think so,' he murmured half aloud.

'Yes, we've our price in the world,' his friend continued slowly, cigar turned downwards and lips pursed, musing. 'The eligible young man is fast becoming an extinct animal. The supply by no means equals the demand. And the result's as usual. We're at a premium in society, and, as economic units, we must govern ourselves accordingly.'

'Ah, that's all very well for rich men like you,' Paul began hurriedly.

'What! do you mean to say,' Thistleton cried, rising and fronting him with a jerk, 'that half the women one meets wouldn't be only too glad to marry the son and heir of a British bar——'

Before he could utter the word that was gurgling in his throat, however, Gascoyne

had clapped his hand upon that imprudent mouth, and cried out, in a perfect agony of disgust, 'No more of that nonsense, for heaven's sake, Thistleton! I hope you haven't breathed a word about it to anybody here in Mentone? If you have, I think I shall die of shame. I'll take the very next train back to Paris, I swear, and never come near either you or the place again as long as I live.'

Thistleton sat down, red-faced, but sobered. 'Honour bright, not a word!' he answered, gazing hard at his companion. 'I've never so much as even alluded to it. The golden-haired Pennsylvanian was trying to pump me all she knew, I confess; but I listened not to the voice of the charmer, charmed she never so wisely through her neat little nose. I resisted the siren like bricks, and kept my own counsel. Now, don't cut up rusty about it, there's a good, sensible fellow. If a man's father does happen to be born——'

But a darted look from Gascoyne cut him short once more with unspoken remonstrance, and he contented himself with

pulling down his collar and flashing his shirt-cuffs to imitate in pantomime a general air of close connection with the British aristocracy.

There was a short pause, during which Thistleton slowly puffed his cigar, while Paul looked out of the window in meditative mood and scanned the blue bay and purple sea, with Bordighera shining white on its promontory in the distance.

It would have been impossible for anybody to deny, as you saw him then, that Paul Gascoyne was essentially a scallywag. He looked the character to perfection. It wasn't merely that his coat, though carefully brushed and conserved, had seen long service and honourable scars; it wasn't merely that his tie was narrow, and his collar *démodé*, and his trousers baggy, and his shoes antique: it wasn't merely that honest poverty peeped out of every fold and crease in his threadbare raiment; the man himself had something of that shy and shrinking air which belongs by nature to those poor souls who slink along timidly through the back alleys of life, and fear to

tread with a free and open footstep the main highways of respectable humanity. Not that, on the other hand, there was anything mean or small in Paul Gascoyne's face or bearing ; on the contrary, he looked every inch a man, and, to those who can see below the surface, a gentleman also. He was tall and well built, with handsome features and copious black hair, that showed off his fine eyes and high white forehead to great advantage. But the day of small things had weighed upon him heavily : the iron of poverty and ancestral care had entered into his soul. The sordid shifts and petty subterfuges of a life far harder than that of his companions and fellow-students had left their mark deep upon his form and features. He was, in short, what Armitage had called him, in spite of his good looks—an obvious scallywag, nothing more or less : a person rightly or wrongly conscious that, by accident or demerit, he fills a minor place in the world's esteem and the world's consideration.

He stood and gazed out of the window abstractedly, reflecting to himself, after all,

that a climb up those glorious gray crags to Sant' Agnese would be far from unpleasant, even though clogged by a golden-haired Pennsylvanian, no doubt wealthy, if only—when suddenly Thistleton recalled him to himself by adding, in an afterthought, 'And we've got to order our donkeys early, for donkeys, too, will be at a premium on Saturday. Political economy very much to the front. Supply and demand again unequally balanced.'

Paul glanced up at the silent rocks once more — great lonely tors that seemed to pierce the blue with their gigantic *aiguilles* — and answered quietly, 'I think I shall walk, for my own part, Thistleton. It can't be more than a couple of thousand feet or so up, and half a dozen miles across country as the crow flies. Just about enough to give one an appetite for one's lunch when one gets there.'

'Ah, but the pretty American's commands are absolute—every man Jack to ride his own donkey. They say it's such fun going up in a body like so many fools; and if everybody's going to make himself a

fool for once, I don't object to bearing my part in it.' And the blonde young man leaned back in his easy-chair and stuck his boots on the fender with a tolerant air of perfect contentment with all mankind and the constitution of the universe.

'I shall walk,' Paul murmured again, not dogmatically, but as one who wishes to settle a question offhand.

'Look here, now, Gascoyne, as the Highland meenister said in his prayer, this is clean rideeklous. Do you mean to say you're too grand to ride a donkey? You think it *infra dig.* for a B. of B. K.—there, will that suit you?—to be seen on a beast which is quite good enough——'

Paul cut him short once more with a gesture of impatience.

'It's unkind of you, Thistleton,' he said, 'to go on harping so often on that threadbare string, when you see how very much pain and annoyance it causes me. You know it's not that. Heaven knows I'm not proud—not that way, at least—what on earth have I got not to be ashamed of? No, the simple truth is, if

you must have it, I don't want to go to the expense of a donkey.'

'My dear fellow! Why, it's only five francs for the whole day, they tell me.'

Paul Gascoyne smiled. 'But five francs is a consideration to me,' he answered, after a slight mental reckoning. 'Fifty pence, you see; that's four and twopence. Four and twopence is an awful lot of money to fling away for nothing!' And he rearranged the logs on the fire reflectively.

'Well, look here, Gascoyne: sooner than mar the harmony of the meeting, I'll tell you what I'll do—I'll stand you a donkey.'

Paul gave a little start of surprise and uneasiness. His colour deepened. 'Oh no,' he said. 'Thistleton, I couldn't allow that. If I go at all, I shall go on my own legs, or else take a beast and pay my own expenses.'

'Who's proud now?' the blonde young man exclaimed, with provoking good-humour.

Paul looked down at him gravely from the corner of the mantelpiece on which his arm rested.

‘Thistleton,’ he said, in a serious voice, growing redder still in the face as he spoke, ‘to tell you the truth, I’m ashamed already of how much I’m letting you do for me. When I first arranged to come abroad with you, and have my expenses paid, I hadn’t the remotest conception, I assure you, of what an awful sum the expenses would come to. I’ve never lived at a hotel like this before, or in anything like such extravagant luxury. I thought the ten pounds I charged for tuition would be the chief item ; instead of which, I see now, you’ve already paid almost as much as that for me in railway fares and so forth, and I tremble to think how much more you may have to pay for my board and lodging. I can’t let you stand me my amusements, too, into the bargain.’

The blonde young man puffed away at his cigar for a moment or so with vigorous good-humour.

‘What a devil of a conscience you’ve got !’ he observed at last, in the intervals of the puffs ; ‘and what a devil of a touchy sense of honour as well, Gascoyne ! I sup-

pose it's in the family ! Why, it's the regular rule ; if you take a vacation tutor to a place of your own choice abroad, you pay his way for him. I call it only fair. You contract to do it. There's no obligation on either side. A mere matter of business.'

'But you come to such a grand hotel and live so royally !' Paul objected with fervour.

'Am I to go to a cabaret and live upon garlic, just to suit your peculiar views of expenditure ?' Thistleton retorted with spirit. 'Can I drink sour wine and eat black bread because you like to be economical ? No, no, my dear fellow. You mistake the position. I want to come to Mentone for the winter. Beastly climate, Yorkshire ; dull hole, the governor's ; lovely coast, the Riviera ; Monte Carlo always laid on at a convenient distance ; lots of amusement ; plenty of fun ; the very place to spend the Christmas vac. in. If I go and say to the governor : "Look here, old boy : I want a pony or two to run down South and amuse myself, just to escape this

infernal dull hole of yours, and to have a turn or two at roulette or something," why the governor 'd no doubt advise me to go and be hanged, in language more remarkable for force than elegance. Very well, then ; what do I do? I go to him and say, pulling a long face, "Look here, sir, I want to read up for my next examination. Devilish clever fellow at my own college—studious, steady, economical — excellent testimonials—all that sort of thing. Sure to come out a first in 'Greats' next time. I propose to read with him at some quiet place in the South of France—say Mentone," suppressing the little detail about Monte Carlo, you understand ; "he'll go for a tenner and his own expenses." What's the result? The governor's delighted. Fishes out his purse—stumps up liberally. Claps me on the back, and says, "Charlie, my boy, I'm gratified to see you're turning over a new leaf at last, and mean to read hard, and get through with credit." And that's the real use, you see, of a vacation tutor.'

Paul listened somewhat aghast to this

candid explanation of his own true function in the modern commonwealth ; then he answered slowly :

‘ It’s rather hard lines on the governor, I fancy. But I suppose I can’t interfere with that. Your arrangements with your father are your own business, of course. As to myself, though, I always feel a little uneasy. It may be all right, but I’m not accustomed to such a magnificent scale of expenditure, and I don’t want to put either you or him to any unnecessary expense in the matter of my living.’

Thistleton threw back his head once more on the easy-chair and mused aloud.

‘ What a conscience ! what a conscience ! I believe you wouldn’t spend an extra sixpence you could possibly save if your life depended upon it.’

‘ You forget,’ Paul cried, ‘ that I have special *claims* upon me.’

The peculiar stress he laid upon that emphatic word ‘ *claims* ’ might have struck anybody less easy-going than Charlie Thistleton, but the blonde young man let it escape his attention.

‘Oh, I know what you mean,’ he retorted carelessly. ‘I’ve heard that sort of thing from lots of other fellows before. Slender means—the governor poor—heavy expenses of college life—home demands—a mother and sisters.’

‘I wish to heaven it was only that,’ Paul ejaculated fervently. ‘A mother and sisters I could easily put up with. But the claims upon *me* are far more serious. It’s a duty I owe to Somebody Else not to spend a single penny I can help, unnecessarily.’

‘By Jove!’ the blonde young man exclaimed, waking up. ‘Not engaged? Or married?’

‘Engaged! Married! No, no. Is it likely?’ Paul cried, somewhat bitterly.

‘The golden-haired Pennsylvanian’s a jolly good investment, I should say,’ Thistleton went on, meditatively. ‘Rolling in coin. A mint of money. She’ll be really annoyed, too, if you don’t come to her picnic, and, what’s more, ride a donkey.’

‘Is she rich?’ Paul asked, with sudden

and unexpected interest, as if a thought had instantly darted across his brain.

‘Rich ! Like Croesus, so Armitage tells me. Rich as Pactolus. Rich as wedding-cake. Rich beyond the wildest dreams of avarice.’

Paul moved from his place at the corner of the mantelpiece, fiery red in the face now, and strolled as carelessly as he could across the room to the window. Then he opened his purse, counted the money furtively, and made a short mental calculation, unobserved. At the end of it he gave a very deep sigh, and answered aloud, with a wrench :

‘Well, I suppose I ought to go. It’s a precious hard pull ; for I hate this sort of thing ; but, then, I have claims—very special claims upon me.’

‘Still, you’ll go, anyhow ?’ Thistleton asked once more.

‘Yes, I’ll go,’ Paul answered, with the air of a man who makes up his mind to have a tooth drawn.

‘And you’ll ride a donkey ?’

‘I suppose I must, if the golden-haired

Pennsylvanian absolutely insists upon it. Anything on earth where duty calls one.'

And he sank, wearied, into the chair by the window.

CHAPTER III.

AL FRESCO.

SATURDAY dawned as lovely a morning as the founders of the feast could possibly have wished it. It was a day to order. Not a touch of mistral embittered the air. The sea shone liquid blue, with scarcely a ripple dimpling its surface; the great gray peaks loomed clear and distinct in hard outline against a solid blue firmament. It is only on the Riviera that you get that perfect definiteness and contrast of colour. Everything looked sharp as in an early Italian picture, with an early Italian sky of uniform hue to throw up and intensify the infinite jags and tatters of the mountain profile.

At ten sharp the first arrivals began to

greet one another with shouts of derision on the road by the station. Thistleton and Gascoyne were among the earliest on the scene. Punctuality, the blonde young man remarked, was one of his companion's most hopeless failings. As they trotted up upon their mettlesome steeds—Paul's more mettlesome, in fact, than was either seemly or agreeable—they found Armitage with four ladies in tow drawn up in a hollow square to receive them. Boys with the provisions stood expectant at the side, and Paul noticed with a distinct tinge of awe that from one of the baskets several necks of bottles protruded, wired and tied, and covered with gold or silver tissue. Then the picnic would actually run to champagne ! What unbridled luxury ! The golden-haired Pennsylvanian must, indeed, as Thistleton had declared, be rich as Pactolus !

A stern sense of duty induced Paul to look around the group for that interesting personage. Unaccustomed to society as he was, and in the awkward position of being introduced from the back of a restive donkey, he was at first aware merely of

a fiery heat in his own red face and a confused blurr of four perfectly unabashed and smiling ladies. Four names fell simultaneously on his unheeding ear, of the sound of which he caught absolutely nothing but the vague sense that one was Madame Somebody, and that two of the rest were Miss Whatsername and her momma. A clear sharp voice first roused him to something like definite consciousness. 'Mr. Gascoyne's my guest, Nea,' it said, in a full and rich American accent, which Paul had hardly ever before heard, 'and Mr. Thistleton's yours. Mr. Gascoyne, you've jest got to come and ride up right alongside of me. And I'll trouble you to look after the basket with the wine in it.'

So this was the golden-haired Pennsylvanian! Paul glanced at her shyly, as who meets his fate, and answered with what courage he could summon up, 'I'll do my best to take care of it, but I hope I'm not responsible for breakages.'

The lady in the deerstalker hat beyond—not the Pennsylvanian—turned to him with a quietly reassuring smile. 'What a

glorious day we've got for our picnic!' she said, flooding him with the light of two dark hazel eyes; 'and what splendid fun it'll be going all that way up on donkeys, won't it?'

For those hazel eyes and that sunny smile Paul would have forsworn himself before any court of justice in all England with infinite pleasure. As a matter of fact, he disliked donkey-riding—he, who could clear a fence with any man in Oxford—but he answered sinfully (and I hope the recording angel omitted to notice the transgression), 'Nothing could be more delightful; and with such lovely views, too! The look-out from the summit must be something too charming for anything.' After which unwonted outburst of society talk, lost in admiration of his own brilliancy, he relapsed once more into attentive silence.

Nea Blair had never, indeed, looked more beautiful. The tailor-made dress and the unstudied hat suited her simple girlish beauty to a T. Paul thought with a sigh how happy he could have been had the call of duty led him thither, instead of towards

the service of the golden-haired Pennsylvanian.

One after another the remaining guests struggled up piecemeal ; and when all were gathered together—a quarter of an hour behind time, of course—for they were mostly ladies—the little cavalcade got itself under way, and began to mount the long steep stairs that lead from the Borrigo valley to the scarp of hog's back which separates the Val des Châtaigners from the Val des Primevères. To Paul, in spite of the eccentricities of his mount, that first expedition into those glorious mountains was one of almost unmixed delight. As they threaded their way in long single file across the wooded *col* that divided the ravines, he looked down with surprise and pleasure into the gracious deep gorges on either side, each traversed by the silver thread of torrent, and reflected to himself with a sigh of pleasure that he had never known the world was so beautiful.

‘ Oh my ! ain't it jest lovely ? ’ Miss Boyton called out to him from behind, for he was sandwiched in between her and Nea

Blair ; ‘and ain’t they jest elegant, the lemon-trees in the valley there !’

‘Which are the lemons ?’ Paul asked, half dubious, for the ravine was filled with trees and shrubs whose very names he knew not.

‘Why, the awfully green trees on the terraces down below,’ Isabel Boyton answered, a little offhandedly.

‘And the silvery gray ?’ Paul inquired with some hesitation. ‘Are they olives, I wonder ?’

‘Of course they’re olives,’ the American answered, with some little asperity. ‘I guess you’ve never been along this way before, Mr. Gascoyne, have you ?’

‘It’s the first time in my life I’ve ever been out of England,’ Paul answered humbly ; ‘and everything is so strange. I find I’ve a great deal to learn all at once—to learn and to remember.’

‘But the olives are lovely, aren’t they ?’ Nea Blair remarked, turning round upon him with that sunny smile of hers for a moment. ‘Lovelier even than your own willows round about Ifley, I think—if any-

thing on earth can be lovelier than dear old Oxford.'

'Then you know Oxford?' Paul exclaimed, brightening up at once.

'Oh yes; I had a brother a few years ago at Oriel. And I know Mrs. Douglas, the wife of the Professor.'

'I wish I'd had a brother at Oxford College,' Miss Boyton put in parenthetically, urging on her donkey; 'I'd have made him take me along and introduce me to all his aristocratic acquaintances. I mean some day to marry one of your English noblemen. I've made up my mind to catch an earl, and be Lady Isabel Something.'

'But you couldn't be Lady Isabel by marrying an earl,' Paul answered, smiling a very curious smile. 'In that case, of course, you'd be a countess.'

'Well, a duke, then,' Miss Boyton answered, imperturbable, 'or a marquis, or a viscount, or whatever other sort of nobleman was necessary to make me into Lady Isabel.'

Paul smiled again. 'But none of them,' he said, 'could make you Lady Isabel.'

You'd be Lady Somebody, you know—Lady Jones, for example, or Lady Smith, or Lady Cholmondeley.'

'Or Lady Gascoyne : that sounds jest lovely,' Miss Boyton interposed with an air of perfect simplicity.

Paul started at the sound, and scanned her close. His ears tingled. Was she really as innocent and harmless as she looked, or had it somehow come round to her—but oh no ; impossible ! 'Yes,' he went on quietly, without noticing the interruption ; 'but you must be born a duke's or an earl's or marquis's daughter to be called Lady Isabel.'

Miss Boyton's countenance fell not a little.

'Is that so ?' she exclaimed plaintively. 'You don't tell, really ! Then I can't be Lady Isabel no matter who I married ?'

'No matter whom you married,' Paul answered with the stern precision of Lindley Murray and a British Peerage in equal proportions.

'Well, now, if that ain't jest too bad !' Isabel Boyton exclaimed with deep mock

pathos. 'Say, Nea, Mr. Gascoyne's crushed the dream of my life. I don't care a cent to be Lady Somebody if I can't be Lady Isabel. And I can't be Lady Isabel whoever I marry. I call it jest heartrending.'

'Won't an honourable or a courtesy-lord do as well?' Nea asked, laughing.

'Oh my, no!' Isabel answered promptly; though what manner of wild-beast a courtesy-lord might be she hadn't the faintest conception. 'I'd most as soon go back to Philadelphia again, returned empty, and marry a stockbroker. I've made up my mind to be Lady Isabel or nothing.'

'Then I'm afraid,' Paul said with a faint little smile, 'I can do nothing for you.'

'But if it were only to make her plain "My Lady," now!' Nea put in laughingly.

Paul laughed in return—an uneasy laugh. They had just reached one of the sudden steep ascents where the sure-footed little donkeys, straining every nerve and muscle in their stout, small legs, climb up the bare rocks like mountain goats, with their human burdens jerking in the saddles like so many meal-bags. 'How the little beasts

grimp !' Paul cried, half surprised ; ' such plucky little creatures, and so strong for their size ! They're really wonderful !'

' That's a good word—"grimp,"' Nea answered from in front. ' Is it pucker English, I wonder ?'

' I do admire it,' Isabel Boyton replied from behind. ' Here, get up, donkey. My Arab steed don't carry me regularly.'

Just at that moment a loud cry of ' Ach Himmel !' resounded from the forefront of the cavalcade, where Madame Ceriolo led the way—Madame Ceriolo, even in the most trying circumstances, never forgot to keep up her French and German—followed next instant by a sharp ' Mon Dieu ! quelle affreuse petite bête !' and the shambling, scrambling noise of a fallen donkey endeavouring to recover itself.

Paul and Armitage were at her side in a moment, to pick up Madame Ceriolo and her unhappy mount. Madame made the most noise, but Blanchette, the donkey, had received by far the most injury. The poor little beast's knees were cut and bleeding, ' Je l'ai couronnée, la méchante,' Madame

said carelessly, and Paul saw at a glance it would be quite unable to continue the journey.

It's an ill wind, however, that blows nobody good. Paul seized the opportunity to effect a double stroke of business—to do a politeness to Madame Ceriolo and to get rid of the onus of his own donkey. Almost before she could have a voice in the matter, or any other man of the party equally gallant or equally uncomfortable could anticipate him, he had shifted the side-saddle from poor, patient, shivering, broken-kneed Blanchette, and transferred it forthwith to the bigger beast he himself had been riding. 'Merci, monsieur, merci ; mille remerciements,' Madame cried, all smiles, as soon as she had recovered her equanimity and her company manners. 'And you, you little brute,' turning to poor Blanchette and shaking her wee gloved fist angrily in its face, 'you deserve to be whipped, to be soundly whipped, for your nasty temper.'

'The poor creature couldn't help it,' Paul murmured quietly, tightening the girths ; 'the road's very steep and very slippery, you

can see. I don't wonder they sometimes come an awful cropper !'

'By Jove !' Armitage said, watching him as he fastened the buckles and bands, 'what a dab you are at donkeys, really, Gascoyne ! You do it like a groom ; you've missed your vocation.'

Paul coloured up to the roots of his hair. 'I've been used to horses,' he answered quietly. Then he turned back without another word to take his place on foot beside Nea Blair and Isabel. 'Here, boy,' he called out to one of the drivers quickly, 'hand me that basket : I'll take it on ; and go down to Mentone with this poor little beast. She'll need looking after.'

He spoke in French fluently, and Nea turned in surprise.

'Why, you said you had never been abroad before !' she exclaimed, taken aback. 'And now you talk like a regular *boulevardier*. Were you born Parisian, or did you acquire it by a miracle ?'

'I've had great opportunities of talking French at home,' Paul answered, a little embarrassed. 'We—a—we always had a

Frenchwoman in the family when I was a child.'

'A governess?' Nea suggested.

'Well, no. Not exactly a governess.'

'A *bonne*, then?'

'No, not quite a *bonne*, either,' Paul replied truthfully. Then, a happy thought seizing him on the moment, he continued, with truth, 'She was a lady's-maid.'

After that he relapsed into silence for a while, feeling painfully conscious in his own mind that his subterfuge was a snobbish one. For though he only meant, himself, to evade a difficulty, he saw at once that Nea Blair would understand him to mean a lady's-maid of his mother's. And as to the possibility of his mother having ever possessed that ornamental adjunct—why, the bare idea of it was simply ridiculous.

CHAPTER IV.

AT SANT' AGNESE.

ONCE restored to the free use of his own two legs, Paul Gascoyne was himself again. As the one member of the party, except the donkey-boys, who went afoot, he was here, there, and everywhere, in waiting upon everybody. What prodigies of valour did he not perform in hauling fat old Mrs. Newton's donkey up the steepest bits, or in slipping down round the sharpest corners to help Nea Blair safely round some difficult gully! What useful services did he not lavish on the golden-haired Pennsylvanian and her shrivelled mamma, walking by their sides where the ledges were narrowest and calming their fears where the rocks towards the slope were

loosest and most landslippy! How he darted from the rear up short-cuts of the zigzags, and appeared in front again, a hundred yards ahead, on some isolated boulder, to encourage and direct their doubtful footsteps! How he scrambled over inaccessible faces of cliff to fetch some fern or flower for Nea, or to answer some abstract question as to the ultimate destination of the minor side-paths from Isabel Boyton! He was a good climber, and he enjoyed the climb—though he feared for his old boots and his carefully-conserved trousers.

The road was long—Sant' Agnese stands some three thousand feet above sea-level—but at every turn the views grew lovelier, and the sense of elation in the mountain air more distinct and delicious. They passed from the region of olives into the zone of pine woods, and then again into that of bare white rock, scarcely terraced here and there by Provençal industry to support a few stunted vines and undersized chestnut-trees. The path wound slowly up the sides of a stony ravine, and then mounted

in a series of sharp elbows the sheer peak itself, to an accompaniment of cries of Franco - German distress from Madame Ceriolo and shrill Transatlantic exclamations of horror from the golden-haired Pennsylvanian. At last they reached the goal of their pilgrimage—a rocky platform high up the last peaks of the jagged mountain, with a gray Ligurian village just clinging to the slopes, and almost indistinguishable from the still grayer wall of bare rock that rose above it in sharp tors and weather-worn chimneys against the deep blue heaven.

‘What a glorious view!’ Nea Blair exclaimed, as they looked down unexpectedly on the northern side into a profound and naked basin of rock, at whose bottom the Borrigo torrent roared and brawled amid its scattered boulders. ‘And what magnificent great peaks away across the valley there!’

‘I guess we’d better fix up lunch on that flat piece by the chapel,’ Isabel Boyton remarked with Occidental practicability, spying out forthwith the one patch of tolerably level ground within reach of the

village. It was a spur of the mountain, covered with that rare object in the Provençal Alps, a carpet of turf, and projecting from the main range far into the semicircle of the deep rock-basin.

‘We’ll fix it up right away,’ Madame Ceriolo answered with good-natured mimicry. Madame Ceriolo had the natural talent for languages which seems to go inseparably with the *rôle* of Continental adventuress, and she spoke American almost as well and with almost as good an accent as she spoke her other alternative tongues. ‘If your momma and Mrs. Newton ’ll set themselves down right here, and make themselves comfortable, Mr. Gascoyne and I will jest unpack the baskets. Come along here, Nea, we want you to help us. Miss Boyton, you get the plates and things ready, will you?’

For a few minutes they were busy arranging everything, Armitage, the blonde young man, and Paul rendering all due assistance; and Paul was aware in an indefinite way that Madame Ceriolo was somehow anxious to keep him off as much

as possible from the golden-haired Pennsylvanian. But as this gave him the opportunity of conversing more with Nea, and as, duty to the contrary notwithstanding, he very much preferred Nea to the heiress of Pactolus, he by no means resented Madame's obvious anxiety in this respect. On the contrary, he salved his conscience with the reflection that it was Madame rather than inclination that kept him away from the lady of the golden hair and prospects.

Such a picnic as that December morning's Paul had never before borne a part in. There were dishes from Rumpelmayer's, cunningly compounded of aspic and olives, whose very names he had not so much as heard, but whereof the rest of the party, more instructed in cookery, talked quite glibly. There were curious salads, and garnishings of crayfish, and candied fruits and pastry and nougat of artistic manufacture. There was much champagne, and vintage clarets, and *Asti mousseux* for those who liked it sweet, and green chartreuse poured from a Cantagalli bottle. For though the picnic was nominally a joint

affair of Nea's and the American's, it was Isabel Boyton who contributed the lion's share of the material provision, which she insisted upon doing with true Western magnificence. The lunch was so good, indeed, that even the beauties of nature went unnoticed by comparison. They had hardly time to look at the glimpse of calm blue sea disclosed between the ridges of serrated peaks, the green basking valleys that smiled a couple of thousand feet below, with their orange and lemon groves, or the flood of sunshine that poured in full force upon the mouldering battlements of the grim and wasted Alps in front of them.

After lunch, however, Paul somehow found himself seated on the slope of the hill with Nea. They had discussed many things—Mentone, and the view, and the flowers, and the village—and Nea had just told him the strange old legend of the castle that clings to the topmost peak—how it was founded by a Saracen who levied tax and toll on all the Christian folk of the country round, and finally became converted to the faith of Europe by the beautiful

eyes of a peasant-girl whose charms had enslaved him, when suddenly she came back plump to the nineteenth century with the point-blank question, 'Where do you live when you're at home, Mr. Gascoyne?'

'In Surrey,' Paul answered vaguely, growing uncomfortably hot.

'Surrey's a big address,' Nea Blair answered, pulling a tiny rock-rose from a cranny in the precipice. 'Any particular part—or do you occupy the county generally?'

Paul laughed, but not with quite a gracious laugh. 'About twenty-five miles from London,' he answered, with evasive vagueness.

'I've lots of friends in Surrey,' Nea went on innocently, unconscious of the mental pangs she was carelessly inflicting on him. 'Do you know Hillborough?'

'Why, that's just where I live,' Paul answered, with a suppressed start.

'Dear me; how funny I haven't met you!' Nea exclaimed in surprise. 'I'm always down at Hillborough, stopping with the Hamiltons.'

‘Indeed,’ Paul responded in a very dry voice.

‘You *must* know the Hamiltons,’ Nea persisted, all innocence. ‘Sir Arthur Hamilton, of the Grange, at Hillborough. He used to be Governor of Madras, you know, or somewhere.’

‘I know them by name, of course,’ Paul admitted uneasily.

‘But not personally?’

‘No, not personally. We—a—we move in different circles.’

‘Then you *must* know the Boyd-Galloways,’ Nea went on interrogatively.

‘Only by sight. I haven’t any large acquaintance at Hillborough.’

‘The Jacksons?’

‘Colonel Jackson I sometimes see, it’s true; but I don’t know him. They’re—they’re not the kind of set I mix with.’

‘Well, of course you know the rector,’ Nea exclaimed, nailing him. ‘The dear old Archdeacon—he’s so nice with everybody.’

‘He comes to us occasionally,’ Paul answered with some reluctance. Then, after

a pause, he added, lest he should seem to be claiming too great an honour: 'But much more often he sends the curate.'

Even yet Nea failed to take in the situation, not because she was slow of understanding, but because it was quite a novel one to her. 'Perhaps you live alone?' she suggested in explanation.

Paul could put off the damning truth no longer.

'On the contrary,' he said, 'my father and mother live and have always lived entirely at Hillborough. But they're not in a position to see much of the local society—in fact, they're not in society in any way. We're quite poor people—what your friend, Mr. Armitage, to use a favourite word of his, would call scallywags.'

There was an awkward pause. Then Nea said again, with a becoming blush:

'Forgive my pressing you. It—it never occurred to me.' Next moment feminine tact induced her to change the subject, not too abruptly. 'I visit a good deal at Hillborough myself, and I thought we'd be sure to have acquaintances in common. But I

live in Cornwall. Have you ever been in Cornwall, Mr. Gascoyne? In summer it's almost as beautiful as this; it is, really.'

'No, I've never been there,' Paul answered, grateful to her for the clever diversion. 'But I shall hope to go,' he added quite seriously.

'Oh, you must, when I get back again there next summer,' Nea cried most warmly. 'It's so awfully lovely. As soon as I'm well I shall long to get home again.'

'You're not here for your health?' Paul inquired, catching her up.

'For my health? Yes. But it isn't serious. Not my lungs, you know,' for Paul had laid his hand instinctively on his chest. 'Only to recover from the effects of an upset in a boat last summer. I've no mother, and papa couldn't bring me abroad himself, because of leaving his parish; so he got Madame Ceriolo to take care of me. She's accustomed to travelling—Madame Ceriolo.'

'Where on earth did he pick her up?' Paul inquired with some curiosity, for, inexperienced in the ways of the world as he

was, Madame Ceriolo's personality had already struck him as a sufficiently singular one for her present occupation.

'Oh, he heard of her from a governess's agency,' Nea answered with much confidence. 'She had excellent testimonials from people of title. She's well connected. And she's a good little thing enough when you really get to know her.'

'I dare say,' Paul answered in that dubious tone which means, 'I don't think so, but I wouldn't be rude enough to contradict you.'

What Nea said next he didn't catch, for his ear was that moment distracted by a side conversation carried on at some little distance, between Armitage and old Mrs. Newton. They were talking low, but, in spite of their low tones, he overheard more than once the vague murmur of his own name; and that man were surely more than mortal whom the sound of his own name overheard in his neighbours' talk would not draw away even from a pretty girl's unimportant *causerie*. He listened without pretending to hear, and put in 'yes,' and 'no,'

to Nea's remarks *à tort et à travers*. 'Only one family of Gascoynes with a "y" and without a "g,"' Mrs. Newton was observing; 'and that's the baronet's. Old Sir Emery Gascoyne, the last of the lot, was very rich, and lived down in Pembroke-shire—in Little England beyond Wales, as they call it locally. But this young man can't be one of *those* Gascoynes, because——' and there her voice sank still lower. Paul strained his ears, but could hear no more. 'So very odd, wasn't it?' Nea was saying appealingly.

'Extremely odd,' Paul assented like a man, though to what particular proposition he was thus boldly committing himself he really hadn't the faintest idea; but, as Miss Blair said so, he had very little doubt it must have been positively ludicrous.

'I stopped there once, at Gascoyne Manor,' Armitage was saying once more, when next a scrap of the conversation was wafted towards him: 'It was in old Sir Emery's time, you know, before the present man came into possession. The present man's *not* a baronet, I fancy; ah, no, exactly

so; that's just as I thought; but he's very rich, and will be lord-lieutenant of the county some day, I'm told. A splendid place, and awfully well kept up. No sort of connection, you may be pretty sure, with young Thistleton's tutor.'

Paul's ears were tingling hot by this time, and it was with difficulty that he so far roused himself as to understand, when Nea said, 'Shall we start at once, then?'—that she had just been proposing a climb to the castle ruins, and that he had unconsciously promised to accompany her on her scramble.

'Certainly,' he said, coming back with a start; and they rose at once, Madame Ceriolo rising too to fulfil to the letter her appropriate functions as contracted and paid for.

'Come,' she said, 'Mr. Thistleton,' with her most girlish smile—and she looked seventeen when she meant to captivate—'come and give me a hand over these dreadful rocks. Mon Dieu! quels rochers! I shall stumble and fall, I know, if I haven't one of the lords of creation to lean upon.'

As they passed through the dark and vaulted alleys of the quaint old town—mere filthy mole-tracks, built round on either side, and strengthened with vaults thrown across from house to house for greater stability in times of earthquakes—Nea glanced up quickly at the gloomy old roofs, and exclaimed with a gay ease, ‘Oh, isn’t it picturesque! I should just love to sketch it.’

‘Very picturesque,’ Paul answered, looking down at the noisome small gutters under foot, where barefooted children scrambled and crawled among the accumulated dirt of five-and-twenty centuries, ‘but very terrible, too, when you come to think that men and women live all their life in it.’

‘Oh, they’re accustomed to it,’ Nea replied lightly, with the easy-going optimism of youth and of the comfortable classes. ‘They’ve never known anything better, I suppose, and they don’t feel the want of it.’

‘Miss Blair,’ Paul said, turning round and facing her suddenly and quite unexpectedly, ‘that sentiment’s unworthy of you. You’re only saying, of course, what

everybody else says ; but we expect something better from *you* than from everybody. Look at the misery and dirt in which these people live, and if contentedly, then so much the more terrible. Discontent is the only spur to improvement. If they're satisfied to live as they do, then they're so much the less human, and so much the more like the beasts that perish. Look how here, on this breezy, open hilltop, among these glorious rocks, their houses are built without sun or air, turned only to the filthy, festering street, and away from the light and the sea and the mountains. They don't care for the view, you say. Their views about views are, no doubt, rudimentary. But isn't it just that that's the saddest thing of all—that where they might enjoy so much fresh air, and sunshine, and health, and beauty, they're content with such gloom and dirt, and misery, and squalor ? You talk like that because you hardly think any class but your own is wholly human. I know better. I know that, up and down, high and low, gentle or simple, all the world over, there's a deal of human nature in men and women. And

it seems to me a terribly painful thing that they should live like this—so painful as to spoil, to my mind, the very sense of picturesqueness in all this picturesque dirt and wretchedness !

He turned round upon her so sharply, and his words flowed so quick, in such a spontaneous outburst of natural eloquence, that Nea Blair was fairly taken by surprise.

‘ You’re right, I know,’ she answered in a very low voice. ‘ I spoke unthinkingly. I was only saying, as you say, what everyone else says. In future, Mr. Gascoyne, I shall remember to think of it and speak of it more seriously.’

Paul blushed in return. He felt he had allowed his natural indignation to carry him away too hastily and unreservedly.

Two hours later, as he came back alone from the Hôtel des Rives d’Or, whither he had gone to see his hostess home, he reflected, with some pangs of remorse to himself, that he had, perhaps, done wrong in paying so much attention to Miss Blair and so comparatively little to the American heiress. Gold, gold ! he should have gone

for gold. It was wrong of him, no doubt—extremely wrong, with those heavy claims upon him. But, then, how very nice Miss Blair was, and how thoroughly he detested this hateful worship of the golden calf and the golden image! If only his lot had been framed otherwise! Marry for money—the hateful idea! How much a man must sacrifice to the sense of duty!

On the table of the *salon* he found a letter awaiting him, with the Hillborough postmark. The handwriting on the envelope was boldly commercial. He tore it open. It was brief and succinct. And this was what he read in it:

‘MY DEAR PAUL,

‘I ought to have written to you before you left Oxford, to say that now you are going abroad it would be a great pity—in case you get thrown into good society—to spoil the ship for a ha’porth of tar, as the common saying is. The time is now coming when we may begin to expect to pull off our *coup*, as the sporting gentlemen call it. Don’t go singing small, as

you're too much inclined to do. Let them know who you are, and take your proper position. At the same time, don't spend too much, and don't get dragged into unnecessary expenses. But keep up your dignity. For this purpose I enclose a ten-pound note, for which kindly sign note-of-hand herewith, as usual. The noble bart. and his lady are well and hearty, and send their respects.

‘Your obedient servant,

‘JUDAH P. SOLOMONS.’

Paul laid down the letter with a sigh of relief. It was a comfort, at any rate, to know he had not done wrong in paying five francs for the beast which, as luck would have it, he had never ridden. He entered it without one qualm of conscience on his accounts : ‘Donkey for picnic, 4s. 2d.’ The item might pass. If Mr. Solomons approved, his mind was easy.

CHAPTER V.

GOSSIP.

‘I THINK, for my part,’ Nea said decisively, enforcing her remark with a dig of her parasol into the gravel walk, ‘the scallywag’s much the nicest of the two. But then, you know, I always did like scallywags. They’ve got so much more humanity and reality about them than—than most other people.’

They were seated once more, the morning after the picnic, on the Promenade du Midi, very stiff from their ride, and full of mutual notes of last night’s entertainment.

Madame Ceriolo smiled her conventional smile, as she replied obliquely: ‘And yet the other one—je ne me rappelle plus son nom—oh yes. Mr. Thistleton: he’s very

agreeable too, and probably, I should say an excellent *parti*.'

'Oh, he ain't much,' Isabel Boyton answered with Yankee directness. 'He's a lot too like a piece of putty for me. Of course he's a fine big boy, and pretty nice to look at; but there's nothing in him. I'm down on mind, I am, and the scallywag's got three times as much of that as Mr. Thistleton.'

'He's clever, I think,' Nea assented with a nod.

'Oh, *you* needn't talk, Nea,' the American put in with a mock-injured air. 'I call it real mean, the way you walked off with my young man that I'd invited on purpose for my own amusement, and left me to talk half the day to that pappy, sappy, vappy, big Englishman, with no more conversation in his six feet six than a ship's figurehead. It was jest downright ugly of her, wasn't it, momma?'

Mrs. Boyton was a dried-up old lady of the mummified American order—there are two classes of American old ladies: the plentiful and the very skimpy—who seldom

contributed much to the interchange of thought, save when her daughter called upon her to confirm her own opinion; and she murmured now dutifully: 'If you asked him for yourself, Izzy, you'd a right to his attentions; but perhaps he most thrust himself upon Miss Blair.'

'He was very kind and attentive to us all,' Nea answered. 'In fact, he did more than anybody else to make everything go off smoothly.'

'I can't find out who the dickens he is, though,' Armitage broke in with a sigh. He was an old *habitué* of the Riviera, and had imbibed all the true Rivieran love for scandal-mongering and inquisitiveness. 'He beats me quite. I never was so utterly nonplussed in all my life. I've tried my hardest to draw him out, but I can get nothing out of him. He shifts, and evades, and prevaricates, and holds his tongue. He won't be pumped, however skilfully you work the handle.'

And Armitage flung himself back in a despairing attitude.

Nea smiled.

‘That’s not unnatural,’ she remarked in parenthesis.

‘The worst of it is, though, the other fellow’s just as reticent as he is,’ Armitage went on, unheeding her. ‘Not about himself, I don’t mean—that’s all plain sailing: Thistleton *père’s* a master cutler at Sheffield, who manufactures razors by appointment to her Majesty (odd implements for her Majesty!), and is as rich as they make them—but about this man Gascoyne, whom you call “the scallywag.”’

‘Oh, say!’ Isabel Boyton interposed frankly, ‘if that ain’t real good now! It was you yourself that taught us the word—we innocent lambs had never even heard of it—and now you want to go and father it upon us!’

‘Well, anyhow, Gascoyne seems to have put Thistleton up to it to keep all dark, for when I try to pump him about his tutor he shuts his big mouth, and looks sheepishly foolish, and can’t be got to say a single word about him.’

‘What was that Mrs. Newton was saying to you yesterday about there being a Sir

Somebody Gascoyne somewhere down in South Wales?' Madame Ceriolo asked with languid interest.

For a foreigner, borne and bred abroad, Madame Ceriolo's acquaintance with English life and English topography was certainly something quite surprising. But then, you see, her dear mamma, as she was careful always to explain to strangers, was English born—the daughter of a dean and niece of a viscount. Very well connected person on every side, little Madame Ceriolo! And a dean is such a capital card to play in society.

'Oh, there was a Sir Emery Gascoyne at Gascoyne Manor, down near Haverfordwest,' Armitage explained glibly; 'a very rich old gentleman of sensitive tastes and peculiar opinions. I stopped there once when I was an undergraduate. Splendid old place—Elizabethan house—delightful park—square miles of pheasants; but ill-tempered, very. If this young fellow's related to *him*—his next-of-kin, heir-at-law, executor, assign, and so forth—now's your chance, Miss Boyton, to pick up that English title I heard you

say yesterday you'd set your susceptible American heart upon.'

The golden-haired Pennsylvanian smiled resignedly. 'It can never—never—never be Lady Isabel,' she observed with pathos. 'And yet I feel somehow like running a coronet.'

'I don't think Mr. Gascoyne can be in any way connected with these Pembroke-shire people,' Nea Blair put in, without the slightest intention of contributing at all to the general gossip. 'He told me his family lived in Surrey—and,' she added after a moment's faint hesitation, 'he implied they were by no means either rich or distinguished.'

'In Surrey? Where—where?' urged a general chorus, in which Armitage's voice and Madame Ceriolo's were by far the most conspicuous.

'I don't know whether I ought to say,' Nea answered simply. 'I dragged it out of him rather, and he told me in confidence.'

'Oh, if it's got to telling you things in confidence already,' Armitage retorted with

a very meaning smile, 'I wouldn't for worlds dream of inquiring any further into the matter. Eh, Madame Ceriolo? What do *you* think about it?'

Thus goaded to a reply, Nea answered at once, with a very red face: 'It wasn't so very much in confidence as all that comes to. He lives at Hillborough.'

'Hillborough,' Armitage repeated with a very abstruse air. 'Then that'll exactly do. A friend of mine's a vicar near Hillborough—the very next parish, in fact, a place called Hipsley—and I'll write and ask him this very day all about the mysterious stranger. For when a man possesses a social mystery, it's a sort of duty one owes to society to turn him inside out and unravel him entirely. Fellows have no right to set us double acrostics in their own persons, and then omit to supply the solution.'

'Here they come,' Madame Ceriolo cried. 'The two Oxonians! You'll have an opportunity now to try your hand again at him.'

Armitage's eye gleamed like a setter's on the trail of the quarry.

‘I’ll have one more try, at any rate,’ he said with an air of virtuous resolution; ‘his birth shall no longer be “wropped in mystery,” like Jeames de la Pluche’s. He shall tell us all. He shall be forced against his will to confess his secret.’

The blonde young man approached them carelessly.

‘Morning, Armitage,’ he said with an easy nod. Then he lifted his hat, ‘Good-morning, Madame Ceriolo. Miss Boyton, I hope your momma’s not overtired this morning.’

‘We’re all too stiff to do anything on earth but sit still and scandalize,’ the pretty American answered with pert fluency. ‘We were scandalizing you two when you hove in sight round the next block. I guess you must have felt your ears tingle.’

Paul felt his tingling at that precise moment.

‘What were you saying about us?’ he inquired eagerly.

Miss Boyton made a graceful and lady-like, though faint, variation on a common gesture of street-boy derision.

‘Wouldn’t you jest like to know?’ she responded saucily. ‘You can’t tell what things we’ve all been hearing about you.’

‘You can hardly have heard much that was true,’ Paul retorted with some annoyance. ‘Nobody here at Mentone knows anything of my family.’

‘What, have you *no* friends here?’ Madame Ceriolo inquired, astonished. ‘How very odd! I thought everybody knocked up against somebody they knew in Mentone. The world’s so absurdly small nowadays.’ And she sighed feelingly.

Paul hesitated.

‘Only one lady,’ he answered, after a brief pause. ‘A friend of my mother’s. And I’m sure you haven’t any of you met her, or else she’d have told me so.’

‘Are you all of you game for a brisk walk to Cap Martin?’ Thistleton put in abruptly, with a jerk of his thumb in the direction indicated. ‘We *must* do something to work off the effects of that infernal jolting.’

‘Bar the swear-word, I quite coincide,’ Isabel Boyton answered.

‘The rest of us are too tired, I think,’ Madame Ceriolo yawned, gazing around her affectedly, and darting a very meaning glance at Armitage.

‘I’ll go,’ that inquiring soul responded promptly, ‘catching on to it,’ as Miss Boyton afterwards observed, like a detective to the traces of a supposed forger.

‘You won’t come, Nea?’ the American asked as she rose to go.

‘I don’t think I can,’ Nea answered hurriedly, looking down at her feet: ‘I don’t feel up to it.’ As a matter of fact, nothing on earth would have pleased her better; but she didn’t like to walk with Paul after Armitage’s insinuations that he had been quick in taking her into his youthful confidence.

‘Well, let’s start at once, then,’ the blonde young man remarked cheerfully: he was always as cheerful as health and wealth and good humour can make one. ‘We’ve got no time to lose, I expect, if we mean to walk out to the point and back before lunch-time.’

As they turned to set out, a woman

passed them very unobtrusively ; a French-woman, as it seemed, neatly, but by no means fashionably dressed, and carrying in her hand a small market-basket. She looked at Paul very hard as she went by, but had evidently not the least intention of recognising him. The young man, however, gazed at her for a moment in obvious doubt : then something within him seemed to get the better of him. He raised his hat, and said, ‘ Bon jour, mademoiselle,’ with marked politeness.

‘ Bon jour, Monsieur Paul,’ the French-woman answered with a respectful smile, evidently pleased at his recognition. And they both passed on upon their respective errands.

But as soon as they were gone, Madame Ceriolo put up her tortoiseshell eyeglass—the eyeglass she reserved for her most insolent stares—and regarded the unobtrusive Frenchwoman from a distance with a prolonged scrutiny. ‘ Nea,’ she said, turning round to her charge with the air of one who has made a profound discovery, ‘ did you take it all in, cett. petite comédie-

là ? How simple ! How comical ! How charmingly idyllic ! He didn't know whether to bow to her or not, in such good company ; but at the last moment he was afraid to cut her. Poor little simpleton ! How very fresh of him ! This is evidently the lady who was his mother's friend, I suppose. She would have saved him the exposure if she could. But he hadn't the tact or the good sense to perceive it.'

'He was quite right to bow,' Nea answered, growing hot, 'whoever she may be ; and I respect him all the more for it.'

'But do you know who she is ?' Madame persisted, all overflowing with suppressed amusement.

'No, I don't,' Nea answered ; 'and it doesn't much matter.'

Madame braced herself up, like a British matron compelled to announce a most shocking truth. 'She's a lady's-maid with a family at the Iles Britanniques,' she answered shortly.

There was a brief pause after the explosion, in the course of which Nea and Isabel Boyton's mamma each digested by degrees

this startling item of information. Then Nea murmured aloud once more, 'I always did and always shall like scallywags. I'm glad Mr. Gascoyne wasn't ashamed to acknowledge her.'

CHAPTER VI.

THE COMMON PUMP IN ACTION.

THE square party of pedestrians turned away along the sea-front, and then, taking the main road towards Nice, struck off for the basking, olive-coloured promontory of Cap Martin. Thistleton led the way with the Pennsylvanian heiress ; Paul and Armitage followed more slowly at a little distance. Isabel Boyton had arranged this order of malice prepense ; for she was a mischievous girl, like most of her countrywomen, and, though not inquisitive enough herself to assist in the process of pumping Paul, she was by no means averse to see that application of social hydraulics put into practice for the general benefit by a third person.

‘Queer sort of body, that little Madame Ceriolo,’ Armitage began as soon as they were well out of earshot. He was one of that large class of people who can seldom talk about anything on earth except some other human being. Personalities largely outweigh generalities in their conversation. With all the world to choose from, with sun, moon, and stars, and heavenly bodies, sea and land and air and ether, stone and soil and plant and animal, history and science and art and letters to form the text of a possible talk, they can find nothing to discuss except some petty detail in the trivial life of some other fellow-creature. That Mrs. Jones has quarrelled with Mrs. Brown, or that Smith has been blackballed at the Cheyne Row Club, seems to them a far more important and interesting fact than an eruption of Vesuvius or a cataclysm at St. Petersburg.

‘She seems good-natured,’ Paul answered, without profoundly gauging the depths of the subject. It was the most charitable thing he could find in his heart to say about her.

‘Oh, good-natured enough, no doubt!’ Armitage went on confidentially; ‘but what a curious person for a man of the world to think of entrusting the care of his daughter to!’

‘Perhaps Mr. Blair’s not a man of the world,’ the younger speaker replied with rare sagacity for his age. ‘Country parsons are often very simple-minded people.’

‘He must be precious simple-minded if he took the Ceriolo for anything but what she is,’ Armitage continued, sneering. ‘A brazen-faced specimen of the cosmopolitan adventuress, if ever there was one. But how clever, too—how immensely clever! ‘Pon my soul, I admire her ingenuity! Having accepted a situation as guardian of the morals of an English young lady, she rises to the full height of her post with astonishing success and astonishing dignity. Her simulation of virtue’s something quite sublime in its own way. Why, you’d hardly believe it; I attempted to flirt with her in the mildest possible manner—I, who am the discreetest and least compromising of mankind, a mountain of prudence—and

the British indignation and icy coldness with which she repelled my gentle advances was truly edifying. No Belgravian mamma that ever lived could have done it more beautifully.'

'Perhaps she didn't care for you,' Paul suggested dryly. 'Even a born flirt doesn't want to flirt with everybody indiscriminately.'

'Perhaps that may be it,' Armitage echoed, somewhat crestfallen. He was over thirty, and he took it ill that a young fellow barely of age as yet should thus calmly snub his pretensions to the *rôle* of lady-killer. 'But, at any rate, her respectability is beyond reproach. Being cast for her part by pure force of circumstances, she accepts the situation and plays it to perfection.'

'She's quite right to respect Miss Blair's youth and innocence,' Paul answered quietly. 'As far as that goes, I think all the better of her for it. Even if she is an adventuress, as you say, she's bound, as things stand, to do the very best she can for her present employer.'

'Oh, of course, of course! You speak

like a book, a nice little Sunday-school book, with a picture on the cover. But from the other point of view, you know, the thing's so ludicrous. Her careful assumption of the highest morality's so transparently absurd. Whenever she delivers herself of one of her little copybook platitudes, I always feel inclined to put my tongue in my cheek and wink gently. There's no doubt about it, though, she's devilish clever. She can talk every blessed European language with equal ease. She seems, like the famous prima donna in the story, to have swindled in every civilized country of the world—and also in Germany.'

Paul smiled.

'Her French is certainly admirable,' he said. 'Her accent's so good. She speaks like a Parisian.'

Armitage darted a hasty glance at him sideways. So the fellow pretended to be a judge of French accent, did he? That was certainly remarkable. A scallywag on accent! 'But her English, too,' he persisted once more; 'what's still odder is her English. She rolls her *rs* a little, to be

sure, and she slurs her *ths*; that's only natural; but what admirable fluency and what perfect command she has of even our slang and our stock quotations! She can pun and jest and bandy chaff in English, French, Italian, and German. She can bully a cabman or browbeat a landlord in ten languages. If her name's really Ceriolo, which Heaven only knows, the way she's learnt English alone is something to my mind truly miraculous.'

'Her mother was English, she says,' Paul suggested in his simplicity. 'A clergyman's daughter, she told me—a Dean Something or other.'

The older hand laughed at him to his face. 'Do you really mean to say,' he cried with an amused air, 'you believe all that? Oh, what charming simplicity! Why, you might as well believe in the Countess's coronet and the family legend and the late lamented Count who was killed at the head of his noble troop of Austrian sympathizers by an infuriated Turk in the war in Servia. No, no, my dear fellow. Don't you see how cleverly all that's been

arranged? Madame has to deal with a respected papa who happens to be an English clergyman. Whatever or whoever the Ceriolo may be, she thoroughly understands our English Philistinism and our English prejudices. The respected papa won't entrust his precious budding daughter to anybody who's not a highly respectable married woman and a member of the Church of England as by law established. Very well, then; we can easily manage that for you; Madame's mamma was an English lady—Anglican, of course—yes, and clerical too—a Dean's daughter; and Madame herself, though born at the ancestral Schloss in the Austrian Tyrol, was brought up by agreement in her mother's religion. Could anything be simpler, more natural or more convincing? And how very well planned! French and German, with the Paris accent and the Viennese culture, and yet all the advantages of an English lady's care and the precise and particular type of Christendom exactly adapted to the needs and requirements of a country clergyman's daughter! By George, she's deep—extremely deep!

But if it were a Frenchman of clerical sympathies she had to deal with, I bet you she'd be a Parisian and a fervent Catholic. Not too *dévôte*, you know, nor austere rigorous, but as Catholic as a *dame du monde* ought to be.'

Paul shifted a little uncomfortably in his pea-jacket. This cynic had clearly devoted all his energies to the study and comprehension of his fellow-creatures, and he read them, it seemed, a trifle too easily. In such a man's hands, who was safe for a moment? Paul was afraid what the fellow might screw and worm out of him.

'The funniest thing of all,' Armitage went on after a short pause, 'is that she speaks all languages well, but none exactly like a born native. Her English is splendid, but her *rs* and *ths* are a trifle German. Her French is good, but her *us* and her *eus* are a trifle English. Her German's prodigious, but her *chs* and her final *gs* are scarcely Hanoverian. And she can't talk in any one of those languages for five minutes at a stretch without helping herself

out now and again quite naturally by a word from another.'

'Perhaps,' Paul said, 'she lived as a child in all three countries.'

'Perhaps so,' Armitage repeated; 'but there's no evidence. However, I mean in any case to clear up her history. I was writing last night to a friend of mine, a parson, who knows Mr. Blair; he's the Vicar of Hipsley, near Hillborough, in Surrey'—he eyed his man close to see the effect upon him—'and I've asked him to find out all he can about her.'

'Indeed!' Paul said, never showing surprise by a muscle of his face. 'I wonder you care to take so much pains about so unimportant a piece of intelligence.'

'Oh, for the girl's sake, don't you know!' Armitage added hastily. 'Of course she's hardly a proper person to have charge of a young lady alone on the Continent. Besides, one naturally likes to know what sort of company one's committing one's self to, doesn't one?'

'I don't think it much matters, as long

as they're decent people,' Paul answered evasively.

'Ah, but that's just the question at issue,' Armitage went on, trying another tack. 'My man at Hillborough will hunt it all up. He's a capital hand at tracking people down. He ought to have been a detective. By the way, I fancy I heard Miss Blair say you came yourself from somewhere near Hillborough.'

'I come from Hillborough town,' Paul answered shortly.

'Then you know Rimington, of course.'

'No, I've never met him.'

'Dear me, how odd! He's vicar at Hipsley. And he's so very much *répandu*, as the French say. Spread about at every tea-fight and lunch and garden-party for twenty miles everywhere round Hillborough.'

'Yes?'

'Yes, really. You *must* have seen him. Though perhaps you took him for a layman or a trainer's assistant. A bull-doggy-looking parson—a regular slogger, with a taste for loud tweeds and a most unclerical neck-tie.'

‘Oh, I know him well by sight,’ Paul answered in haste ; ‘I only meant I’d never spoken to him.’

Armitage altered the venue once more. ‘I’ve been down in that part of the world myself,’ he went on reflectively, ‘and I don’t remember to have met any Gascoynes there.’

‘Most likely not,’ Paul answered with energy.

‘You spell your name like the Pembroke-shire people,’ his persecutor went on. ‘It’s a very rare way. Do you happen to be related to them?’

Thus brought to bay, Paul answered, ‘Yes’ with a very great effort, and then relapsed into silence.

But Armitage was not going to let him off so cheap. ‘You don’t mean to say so!’ he exclaimed with real interest, for the scent was growing very warm now. ‘Then what relation are you to the present baronet?’

There was no escape from it any longer. Paul gasped for breath. ‘Mr. Armitage,’ he said, turning suddenly upon him like a hunted creature at bay, ‘you’ve no right to

question a stranger like this. My private affairs are my private affairs. I refuse to answer. I decline to say what relation I am to the present Sir Emery.'

He slipped out the words without weighing them well. Armitage leapt upon them with the true joy of the chase. 'The present Sir Emery!' he exclaimed with much irony, 'why, that's a queer thing to say! You must be very ill-informed as to the history of your own family, it seems, Gascoyne. I should be sorry to pit my information against yours, but I was under the impression, shared, I believe, by society at large, that the late Sir Emery was the last of the name, and that the property in Pembrokeshire had gone to a distant cousin, who's not a baronet at all, Mrs. Newton tells me.'

No man can stand having his veracity impugned by such an obvious innuendo of falsehood as that. Paul Gascoyne drew a deep breath once more and answered warmly: 'There you have been misinformed. It's not my business to set you right. You can correct your mistake by looking in a

peerage. But if you *must* know, the present baronet is my father, Sir Emery Gascoyne, and he lives at Hillborough.'

Armitage gazed at the flushed young face and angry eyes in blank astonishment. Apparently, the fellow believed what he said; but how absurd, how incredible! This scallywag the heir of the Gascoyne baronetcy and the Pembrokeshire estates! What blunder could he have made? What error of identity? What mistake of fact? What confusion of persons?

However, being a very politic young man, and having now obtained all the information he wanted or was likely to get, he hastened to answer, in his most soothing tones, 'Dear me! I must have been misinformed. I fancied I'd heard so. A very great family, the Gascoynes of Pembrokeshire. I stopped once down at—at your uncle's place,' and he glanced inquiringly at Paul, who fronted him angrily; 'what a magnificent house, and so well kept, too, with such lovely gardens!'

'Old Sir Emery was *not* my uncle,' Paul answered curtly. 'I never saw him. But

the subject's one I don't care to talk about.'

At the top of the hill they changed partners. Armitage, all agog with his news, took Isabel Boyton ahead quickly. 'Well, I've found out who he is,' he cried, with triumph in his face; 'or, at least, what he calls himself. Now's your chance for that English title, after all, Miss Boyton. He tells me his father's a real live baronet.'

'He's quite nice,' Isabel answered, gravely digesting the news, 'and I don't know that he mightn't fit the place. I hook on to him, Mr. Armitage.'

The Englishman smiled at her credulous simplicity. A baronet's son! That threadbare scallywag!

They returned by the inland road in varying moods. Paul, hot with the thought that that horrid secret would now get abroad all over Mentone and make him the laughing-stock of the Promenade du Midi, went home alone to the Hôtel Continental. Armitage burst radiant into the Jardin Public, big with his latest item of gossip.

He found Madame Ceriolo equally excited with her own discovery.

‘Just fancy,’ she said, as he sat down by her side : ‘figurez-vous, mon ami, you saw that woman Mr. Gascoyne bowed to the moment he left us? Well, who in the world do you suppose she is? A lady’s-maid—a lady’s-maid at the Iles Britanniques! And he raised his hat to her exactly like an equal!’

‘And who do you think he is himself?’ Armitage cried, all eagerness. ‘You’ll never guess. It’s too absurd. He says his father’s a British baronet.’

‘Oh no!’ Nea Blair exclaimed, flushing hot with a burst of sympathetic shame. ‘He never said that! He told me quite the contrary. It can’t be possible.’

‘He did, honour bright, I give you my word for it,’ Armitage answered, exploding. ‘He’s the heir to the finest estate in all South Wales, and he’s the last descendant of an ancient and noble family that came over, like the Slys, with Richard Conqueror.’

‘I don’t believe it,’ Nea exclaimed

stoutly ; meaning, not that she disbelieved Paul, but disbelieved the report of his ever having said so.

‘ No more do I, Miss Blair, if you ask my honest opinion,’ Armitage answered, laughing. ‘ I expect his uncle’s the same sort of baronet as the unfortunate nobleman who lately languished so long in Portland Prison.’

‘ There’s a good deal of doubt about baronetcies, I believe,’ Madame Ceriolo mused to herself aloud. ‘ They’re not so regularly looked into as peerages. And I’m given to understand there are a great many baronets knocking about loose on the world at present, who have no more claim to be called Sir Somebody So-and-so than I have to be called—well, the Queen of England.’

Very dangerous ground for you, Madame Ceriolo !

CHAPTER VII.

SIR EMERY AND LADY GASCOYNE AT HOME.

SIR EMERY GASCOYNE, Baronet, sat in his own easy-chair in front of his own fireplace at Hillborough, Surrey. It was evening, and Sir Emery rested after his day's labours. He had been out driving from two in the afternoon, and it was cold winter weather for holding the reins, for Sir Emery always drove himself. He had ample reason. His fingers were numbed and cramped with driving. He found it difficult, indeed, to enter in a book a few notes he was endeavouring to make of his afternoon's engagements. 'Ere, Faith, girl,' the British baronet called to his daughter in the adjoining room, 'I can't 'old the pen. Come along and enter them drives to-day,

will you? I'm most clemmed with cold, it's that keen and bitter up o' Kent's 'Ill this weather.'

'Just wait a minute, father dear,' Faith answered cheerily from the kitchen behind. 'I'm coming directly. We're hotting up some soup for your supper, here, mother and I. It's lovely soup, darling, and it'll thaw you out just beautifully as soon as you drink it.'

The voice was a voice like her brother's own—soft and sweet, with a delicate intonation that made each syllable clear and distinct as the notes of a bell. Sir Emery listened to it with a fatherly smile, for he loved her well. 'God bless that girl!' he said to himself, laying down the pen he could scarcely wield. 'It's a comfort to 'ear 'er. She do make a man glad with that pretty small voice of 'ers.'

Sir Emery's room was neither large nor handsomely furnished. It was entered direct from the street by a buff-coloured door, and it led by a second similar one into the kitchen behind it. The centre of the apartment was occupied by a square table,

with flaps at the side, covered with that peculiar sort of deep-brown oil-cloth which is known to the initiated as American leather. A sideboard stood against the further wall, decorated with a couple of large spiky shells and a spotted dog in dark red-and-white china. The spotted dog Faith had attempted more than once surreptitiously to abolish, but Sir Emery always brought it back again to its place in triumph : it had been his mother's, he said, and he was sort of attached to it. A couple of cane-bottomed chairs, a small horsehair couch, and the seat which Sir Emery himself occupied, completed the furniture of the baronet's reception-room.

And yet there were not wanting, even in that humble home, some signs of feminine taste and æsthetic culture. The spotted dog was an eyesore that Faith could never quite get rid of ; but the cheap porcelain vases, with the red and blue bouquets painted crudely on their sides, and the pink paper flowers stuck into their yawning mouths, she had sternly and successfully repressed some months ago. In their place

two simple little monochromatic jars of Linthorpe pottery were installed on the mantelpiece, and some sprigs of green and late-lingering chrysanthemums usurped the former throne of the pink-paper monstrosities. The curtains were plain, but of a pretty cretonne ; the covering of Sir Emery's chair itself was neat and cheerful ; and the antimacassar on the couch, worked in simple crewels, had at least the negative merit of unobtrusiveness and harmony. Altogether one could easily see at a glance it was a working man's cottage of the superior sort, kept neat and sweet by loving and tasteful hands, which did all in their power to relieve and diversify its necessary monotony.

For the British baronet was not known as Sir Emery at all to his friends and neighbours, but simply and solely as Gascoyne the Flyman. Most of them had heard, indeed, in a vague and general way, that if everybody had his rights, as poor folk ought to have, Martha Gascoyne would have been My Lady and the flyman himself would have ridden in a carriage

through the handsomest park in the county of Pembroke. But as to calling him anything but plain Gascoyne—him, the driver they had known so well from his childhood, when he played in the street with them all as children—why, it would no more have occurred to those simple souls than it occurs to any of us to address the ordinary familiar descendant of Welsh or Irish princes as ‘Your Highness’ or ‘Your Majesty.’

Sir Emery knocked the ashes out of his black clay pipe, and waited patiently for the advent of his soup. As soon as it arrived he ate it heartily, at the same time dictating to Faith the various items of his day’s engagements (for at Hillborough long credit businesses were the order of the day): ‘Cab from station, Mrs. Morton, one-and-six ; put it two shillin’ ; she’ll never pay till Christmas twelvemonth ! To Kent’s ‘Ill an’ back, Cap’en Lloyd, ‘alf a suverin’ ; no, ‘arf a suverin’s not a penny too much, missus ; and then to the Birches, Mrs. Boyd-Galloway ; that lot’s worth ‘arf a crown, Faith. If ever we see the colour of ‘er

money, 'arf a crown's not a farden too 'igh for it.'

Faith entered the items dutifully as she was bid, and laid down the ledger with a sigh as soon as they were finished. 'I can't bear to think, father,' she said, 'you have to go out driving cold nights like these, and at your age, too, when you ought to be sitting home here comfortably by the fire.'

'I can't abear to think it myself neither,' Mrs. Gascoyne echoed—for why keep up, now we're in the bosom of the family, the useless farce of describing her as *My Lady*? It was only in the respected works of Debrett and Burke that she figured under that unfamiliar and noble designation. To all the neighbours in Plowden's Court she was nothing more than plain Mrs. Gascoyne, who, if everybody had their rights, would no doubt have been a real live lady.

The baronet stirred the fire with meditative poker.

'It's a wonderful pity,' he murmured philosophically, 'that nothing couldn't never

be done in the way of makin' money out of that there baronite-cy. It's a wonderful pity that after all them years we should be livin' on 'ere, missus, the same as usual, a-drivin' a cab day an' night for a livelihood, when we're acshally an' in point of law an' fac' baronites of the United Kingdom. It beats me 'ow it is we can't make money out of it.'

'I always think,' Mrs. Gascoyne responded, taking out her knitting, 'that you don't understan' 'ow to do it, Emery.'

'Mother dear!' Faith said low, in a warning voice, for she knew only too well whither this prelude inevitably tended.

The baronet of the United Kingdom slowly filled his pipe once more, as he finished the soup and poured himself out a glassful of beer from the jug at his elbow. 'It can't be done,' he answered confidently. 'There ain't no doubt about it that it can't be done. It stands to reason it can't. If it could be done, Mr. Solomons 'ud 'a done it, you warrant you, long ago.'

'This ain't 'ow you'd ought to be livin' at your age, though, Emery,' Mrs. Gas-

coyne went on, sticking to her point. 'If we only knowed 'ow, we'd ought to be making money out of it some 'ow.'

'Mr. Solomons is a rare clever man,' the baronet replied, puffing vigorously away at the freshly-lighted pipe. 'Wot I say is this, missus, if it could 'a been done, Mr. Solomons 'ud 'a done it.'

Faith made a bid for a gentle diversion.

'I met Mr. Solomons this evening,' she said, 'as I was coming home from school, and he told me to tell you he'd look in on business to-morrow morning, before you went down to meet the 10.40.'

'You're tired, Faith,' her father said, eyeing her kindly.

Faith smoothed back the hair from her high white forehead—so like her brother's.

'Only a little bit, father,' she answered with rather a wearied smile. 'It's the Infants that are so tiring. They wear one out. They don't mean to be worries, poor little souls! of course; but they do distract one a bit sometimes.'

'I wish you was well quit of them Infants,' Mrs. Gascoyne remarked, 'and could 'and

them over to the pupil-teachers. The big girls don't give no trouble at all, in the manner of speaking, by the side of the little ones. It's when you've took the Infants, I always take notice, you comes 'ome most worn and tired-like.'

'Oh, it's nothing,' Faith answered, taking her mother's hand in hers and smoothing it gently. 'It'll be over soon for this term—the holidays begin on Wednesday. And when I think of father, driving out in the cold on Kent's Hill this weather, I'm ashamed of myself to think I ever complain a word about the Infants.'

'They're rarely trying, them Infants, I'll be bound,' her father continued, philosophically slow. 'I mind what it was myself, when you was all little ones, you an' Paul an' the rest, afore we buried 'Ope and Charity, playin' around among the 'osses' feet, an' kickin' up that row that a man couldn't 'ardly 'ear to take a order. Charity was a rare one to make a noise, she was; she was the biggest o' the three, when you was all born: "for the greatest o' these," says the parson, "is Charity." And wot it

must be to 'ave twenty or thirty of 'em, all to once, a-cryin' and a-chatterin', why it beats everything.'

'Ope an' Charity was two blessed little creatures,' Mrs. Gascoyne interposed with a tear in her eye. 'They never got in nobody's way, I'm sure, Emery. 'Ope 'ud be eighteen year old come May, if she'd 'a lived. An' Charity was always 'ead of the class in 'rithmetic. Miss Taylor, she says to me more 'n once, "Wot a wonderful 'ead that there child o' yours have got, to be sure, Mrs. Gascoyne, for figgers and such-like!"'

'E's a rare clever man, Mr. Solomons,' the father repeated, relapsing, after the wont of his kind, into the dominant subject; 'an' if any man could do it, you take my word for it, missus, Mr. Solomons 'ud 'a done it.'

'It seems sort o' throwed away as things stand now,' Mrs. Gascoyne went on, in spite of a quick deprecatory glance from her daughter's eyes. 'It ain't no good at all, as far as I can see, except for a customer to chaff you about sometimes.'

The baronet blew the smoke slowly through his ringed lips. 'I might 'a kep' a public, an' made money out of it that way,' he said, 'but you was always agin a public, mother; an' I don't blame you for it. A public's a poor sort o' way for a man to employ a historical name, as Mr. Solomons put it. But if I 'adn't 'a been married now, afore the title came to us, I might 'a made something of it like that myself, you see, missus—meaning to say, in the way of a hairess.'

Poor Faith saw that the bolt had fallen—that well-known bolt which descended with periodical regularity from the clear sky of her father's unruffled good-humour—and she gave up the attempt any longer to delay the rising tempest.

'I'm sure, Emery,' her mother broke in, with a stifled sob, 'you needn't always be a-castin' that in my teeth—that I stood in your way agin' makin' your fortune. It ain't no fault o' mine, nor my people's, neither, that you was took with me and arst me to marry you. Arnt Emily was always agin my 'avin' you. An' there was

many as said at the time, you know yourself well enough, I'd throw'd myself away, and I might 'a done better far to take another one. Why, there was Alferd Dyke, him as owned the mill at Chase's Corner——'

The baronet of the United Kingdom checked her threatened outburst of early reminiscences kindly. 'It ain't for myself I'm thinkin', mother,' he said, with a nod or two of his chin—'it ain't for myself not anyways, but for the children. Wot a thing it 'ud 'a been for Faith and Paul, now, if I'd 'a 'appened to be a bachelor, don't you see, at the time wen this thing fell in, and 'ad married a hairress, as would 'ave brought 'em up like ladies and gentlemen—ladies an' gentlemen the same as they'd ought to be !'

Faith couldn't forbear a gentle smile.

'But, father dear,' she said, smoothing his hand with hers, 'don't you see yourself it wouldn't have been Paul and me at all in that case? It 'd be somebody else we none of us know or care anything about, wouldn't it ?'

‘But it do seem a pity,’ her father went on musingly, ‘that the value of the baronite-cy, for commercial purposes,’ he paused awhile, and then repeated once more that high-sounding phrase, ‘for commercial purposes,’ rolling it on his palate like one who loved it, ‘should ’a been clean throwed away, as Mr. Solomons says, all through the fack that I ’appened to be married afore I come into it.’

Mrs. Gascoyne’s handkerchief went up to her eyes with dramatic rapidity; and Faith, holding up one finger in warning to her father, stroked her mother’s hair with her other hand with filial tenderness. ‘I wish,’ she said half angrily, ‘Mr. Solomons had never put these ideas into your head, father. I’m sure you’d never have thought of it all for yourself. You’d never have dreamt of making money out of anything on earth so sacred as that is.’

‘I don’t say, Faith,’ her father went on, eyeing his beer with the light of the paraffin lamp shining through it, ‘I don’t say as ever I’d ’a married for money, or made capital like, as Mr. Solomons says, out o’

the title an' that. I don't say as I've the manners or the eddication to do it. I'm satisfied with your mother, as 'as always bin a true an' faithful wife to me, in sickness an' in 'ealth, an' no woman better.'

'If you weren't,' Faith interposed, 'you'd be the ungratefulest man in all Hillborough.'

'If I wasn't,' her father repeated dutifully, following his cue, 'I'd be the ongratefulest man in all Hillborough. I know all that, an' I ain't a-denyin' of it. But wot I says is just this: I says to Solomon this very last Sunday, "Mr. Solomons," says I, "if I'd 'a bin a bachelor wen this title fell in, there's many a tidy woman as 'ad her thousand pound or two put away in the bank 'ud 'a bin glad to call 'erself Lady Gascoyne on the strength of it.'"

'Emery,' his wife sobbed, holding her face in her hands, 'I call it most onmanly of you. Many's the time I've done a good cry, all along of your talking in that onmanly manner.'

The father of the family turned round to her soothingly. 'Mind you, mother,'

he went on, in a demonstrative voice, 'I don't say as I'd ever 'ave wanted 'er for all 'er thousands. I ain't that kind, I'm not one as sets so much store by the money. Wot I do say is, as a matter o' business, it's a pity the baronite-cy should be throwed away, an' all for nothing.'

'It won't be throwed away,' the mother responded, drying her eyes hysterically, 'not after our time. Paul 'ave 'ad a good education, an' Paul 'll marry a woman as is fit for 'im.'

'There ain't no doubt at all about that,' the British baronet answered in a mollified tone. 'As Mr. Solomons says, our Paul 'ave a splendid future before him.'

'Oxford 'ave made a gentleman of 'im,' Mrs. Gascoyne continued, gloating over the words.

'It 'ave,' the father replied, gazing deep into the fire. 'There ain't no doubt of it. We've all got reason to be main grateful to Mr. Solomons for that much.'

'I never feel quite so sure about that, somehow,' Faith ventured to say. 'I often wonder whether Paul wouldn't have been

happier, and whether we wouldn't all have been happier, if Mr. Solomons had never meddled at all in our private business.'

'I do wonder at you, Faith!' her mother exclaimed, aghast. 'You to talk like that, when we ought all to be so beholden like to Mr. Solomons!'

'Look what 'e've done for Paul!' the father cried eagerly. 'If it wasn't for 'im, Paul might be tendin' the 'osses still, the same as I do.'

'But we've got to pay him for it,' Faith answered stoutly. 'Sooner or later we've got to pay him. And see what notes of hand he's made you sign for it!'

'Ay, but Paul 'll settle all that,' the father replied with absolute confidence, 'and afore long, too, I warrant you, little one! Why, if it 'adn't bin for Mr. Solomons, we'd never so much as 'a thought o' sendin' 'im to college an' makin' a gentleman of 'im. An' now, Mr. Solomons says, 'e's a'most through with 'is collegin', an' ready to make 'is start in life. If 'e does as Mr. Solomon means 'im to do, 'e'll pay it all off, principal an' interest, as easy as winkin'. We've all got

reason to be main grateful to Mr. Solomons. 'E's a clever one, 'e is, if ever there was one. An' 'e says it as knows, says 'e to me, "Gascoyne," says 'e, "your boy Paul, if 'e plays 'is cards well," says 'e, "as 'e'd ought to play 'em, 'ave a splendid future," says 'e, "before 'im."'

'But he won't play them as Mr. Solomons wants him, I'm sure,' Faith answered, unabashed. 'He'll play them his own way. He can't do any other.'

'E'll pay it all off,' the baronet repeated, ruminating the words with infinite pleasure, 'e'll pay it all off, when 'e once gets 'is start, principal an' interest, as easy as winkin'.'

The happiness he derived from the mere sound of those opulent expressions, 'principal and interest,' as he rolled them on his palate, seemed more than to repay him for any little passing discomfort the sense of indebtedness to his supposed benefactor might otherwise have cost him. It makes a man feel almost like a capitalist himself when he can talk glibly about principal and interest.

CHAPTER VIII.

PAUL'S ADVISER.

IN another room at Hillborough, that self-same evening, two other people were discussing still more eagerly together this identical problem of the market-value of a British baronetcy.

The house in which they discussed it had a dingy, stingy, gloomy-looking front, commanding a full view of the market and the High Street; and on the venerable wire-blinds in the office-window the inquiring wayfarer might make out through the dust that clogged them the simple legend, 'Judah P. Solomons, Auctioneer and Estate Agent.' Not that Mr. Solomons really subsisted upon the net profits of his auctioneering and his commission on rents. Those were

but the ostensible and officially - avowed sources of his comfortable revenue. The business that really enriched Mr. Solomons — for Mr. Solomons was undoubtedly rich — was the less respectable and less openly-confessed trade of a general money-lender. Mr. Solomons was, in fact, by profession a capitalist. He made those familiar advances, on note of hand alone, without security, at moderate interest, which have so often roused our ardent admiration for the generous mixture of philanthropic spirit and the love of adventure in the amiable lender when we read the tempting announcement of the proffered boon in the advertisement columns of our pet daily paper.

Mr. Solomons himself, the philanthropist in question, was a short but portly man of a certain age : it was clear he had thriven on the results of his well-directed benevolence. His figure was rotund and his face fat ; he had small, black, beady eyes, rich in life and humour ; and his mouth, though full, was by no means deficient in human kindness. His hair was curly, and displayed, perhaps, a trifling disregard of

economy in the matter of bear's grease ; but his entire appearance was not wholly unprepossessing : he looked like a sharp and cunning business man, in whom, nevertheless, the trade of assisting his fellow-creatures in distress (for a modest percentage) had not altogether killed out the heart that beat within the ample and well-filled fancy waistcoat. The acute reader may, perhaps, already have jumped to the conclusion that Mr. Solomons was by race a Jew, and in that conclusion the acute reader would not, as a matter of fact, have been quite unjustified. In creed, however, Mr. Solomons had conformed so successfully to the Church of England (mainly, perhaps, for business reasons) that he filled at that moment the onerous post of vicar's churchwarden for the parish of Hillborough. In a country town Judaism is at a discount ; and Mr. Solomons was too good a Jew at heart ever to touch anything at a discount, except, of course, for the purpose of bulling or bearing it.

The younger gentleman, who sat opposite Mr. Solomons at the first-floor fireplace

above the dingy office, was half an inch taller, and many inches smaller round the waist; but he otherwise bore a distinct resemblance in figure and feature to his prosperous relative. Only, in Lionel Solomons' face, the cunning and the sharpness of his uncle's eyes and mouth seemed, if anything, to be actually exaggerated, while the redeeming qualities of good-humour and good-fellowship were both, on the contrary, conspicuous by their absence. Lionel was handsome with the Oriental handsomeness of the well-fed young Jew; and he had brought down from town with him the offensive underbred jaunty cosmopolitanism of the shady middle class in that great desert of London which is so peculiarly repulsive to a cultivated understanding. His hair was even curlier and more oleaginous than Mr. Solomon's own; and he held between his lips a cheap bad cigar, which he managed with all the consummate easy grace of a gentleman accustomed to ride into the City every morning in the envied seat beside the driver of the omnibus he honoured with his distinguished patronage.

Mr. Solomons unrolled a packet of greasy, much-folded papers, which he had taken from a pigeon-hole in the safe by his side, and laid them one after another upon his knee, where he regarded them close with evident affection. ‘Yes, Leo,’ he said reassuringly, ‘they’re all right enough. Every penny of that money’s as safe as houses.’

‘I’d like to see the collateral, that’s all,’ Mr. Lionel answered, with a jaunty toss of his curled head. ‘It’s a precious lot of money to lend upon personal security, and that a man of straw, or less than straw, if it comes to that, Uncle Judah.’

Mr. Solomons took up the newest of the lot and examined it tenderly. ‘Twelve months after date,’ he mused to himself in a softly murmuring tone, ‘for value received—two hundred pounds—renewable with twenty per cent. interest, Emery Gascoyne—perfectly regular. It’s a good investment, Leo—a good investment.’ He turned over a second, and looked at the endorsement. ‘Sir Emery Gascoyne, Bart.,’ he continued softly, ‘accepted as fair as an acceptance

can be. Good business, Leo, my boy—very good business.'

'How much did you give him for this two hundred, now?' Mr. Lionel asked in a somewhat contemptuous tone, taking it up carefully.

The elder man seized it once more with a nervous grasp, like one who fears to let a favourite and fragile object pass for a moment out of his own possession.

'A hundred and fifty,' he answered, refolding it and replacing it in due order; 'and then twenty per cent., you see, on the full two hundred, every time it's renewed, after the first year, gives a good interest.'

Lionel looked up with an amused air.

'Well, all I can say,' he put in with a smile, 'is—that ain't the way we do business in the City.'

'Perhaps not,' his uncle answered with a faint air of vexation. It was evident that this was his pet venture, and that certain vague doubts as to its perfect soundness in his own mind made him all the more impatient of outside criticism. 'But, Leo, you don't know everything in London.'

One of the great points in a country business is just that—to be able to tell who you can trust, and who you can't, on their own sense of honesty.'

Mr. Lionel sneered.

'I trust nobody myself,' he responded vigorously, puffing at his cigar with a violent puff, to enforce the full depth and breadth of his sentiment.

'Then that's bad business,' Mr. Solomons answered, with one fat forefinger raised didactically. 'Take my word for it, my boy, that's bad business. I wouldn't be half what I am now, and you'd be helping me in the old shop in the Borough, if I'd trusted nobody. But I knew who to trust, and that's what's made me. Bind 'em down on paper as fast as you can, of course; I'm not one to omit having everything legal, and fixed, and regular; but all the papers and stamps and parchments in the world won't do you any good if you've got hold of a rogue. No, never a stamp of them! A rogue can't be made to pay if he don't want. A rogue 'll go through the court to spite you. A rogue 'll take things before

his honour the county court judge, and explain everything; and his honour 'll give judgment for reduced interest. It ain't the paper and the stamps and the signatures that does it; it's the man himself you've got to trust to. You once get hold of an honest man, and if he works his fingers to the bone, and his knees to the stumps, he'll pay you somehow—principal and interest; he'll pay you somehow. And Sir Emery Gascoyne, Bart., he's an honest man, and so's Paul. He may be only a cab and fly proprietor,' Mr. Solomons went on, giving his debtor the full benefit of his whole legal designation; 'but Sir Emery Gascoyne, Bart., cab and fly proprietor, of Plowden's Court, Hillborough, is as honest a man as ever stepped, and Paul, his son, is one that takes after him.'

'It was that title of "Bart.," in my opinion, that led you astray in the first instance,' his nephew went on with a touch of scorn in his voice; 'and having once begun, you didn't like to confess your mistake, and you've kept to it ever since, getting deeper and deeper in it.'

Mr. Solomons shuffled uneasily in his chair. The young man had touched him on a tender point. 'I don't deny, Leo,' he answered with apologetic softness, 'that the title of "Bart." had a great deal to do with it. A man's who's born a Jew can't get over that; and I'm proud to think, if I've changed my religion, I've never attempted to shake off my ancestors. It came about like this, you see. It was six years ago or more—let me see, I have it here—yes, seven years ago on the fourth of February—number one falls due on the fourth every year; it was seven years ago Gascoyne came to me, and he says, "Mr. Solomons, I want your advice, knowing you to be a better man of business than any lawyer in the town"—for Gascoyne knows Barr and Wilkie are fools—"and I've just come into a baronetcy," says he. Well, when I heard that, I lifted my hat, having always a strong respect for rank and title and everything of that sort—I wouldn't be one of the seed of Abraham if I hadn't—and I said to him, "Sir Emery, I'm very glad to hear it; and if there's anything I can do for you

in the way of a little temporary accommodation"—thinking, of course, there was money coming with it, as a man would naturally expect with a baronetcy—"I'll be happy to arrange it on the most moderate terms for you." For when a man in his position comes into a title and a big estate, he's likely to want a little temporary accommodation at first, just to make a good show when he goes to claim his own of the executors.'

'To be sure,' his nephew assented blandly.

'Well, you see,' Mr. Solomons went on, still in a very self-exculpatory tone, 'it soon turned out that there wasn't any money—that the money'd all gone to the other branch of the family. But having made Sir Emery a preliminary advance, and having been the very first man in the world to call him "Sir Emery"—Mr. Solomons loved to repeat that title in private life whenever he could; it was so dear to his soul to be thus brought into contact with a real live baronet—I thought to myself, "Well, having once begun, I'll see the

thing through to the bitter end now, whatever it costs me." And I look at it accordingly, Leo, as a long investment.'

'A very long investment indeed!' Mr. Lionel answered, with an ugly smile. 'You'll never see a penny of your money again, I take it.'

'I'll see every farthing of it back in full, I'll take my davy!' his uncle retorted, with a rather red face—his heart was suspected. 'Gascoyne and his son are honest people—good honest people as ever lived—and they'll pay me all, if they work themselves to death for it. But it wasn't only the money I thought of,' he continued, after a short pause. 'No, no, Leo. It wasn't only the money I thought of.'

'It's all *I* think of,' his nephew said candidly.

'Then so much the worse for you, my dear,' Mr. Solomons replied with equal frankness. 'That's a mistake in life. You miss the half of it. What I thought was this. Here's this man—a common flyman—a petty little cab-owner with four horses of his own—no more than four horses, and

screws at that ; but a British baronet. If you and I were to work all our lives, Leo, and slave and save, and toil and moil, we'd never rise to be British baronets. But this man's born one, d'you see, or born as good as one ; born what you and I'd give ten thousand pounds to be made this minute. Says I to myself, turning the matter over, What a pity to think there's nothing to be made, for him or for me, out of Gascoyne's baronetcy ! If Gascoyne was younger, says I, and better brought up, he might have made money out of it by marrying an heiress. But he's married already, and the old lady's not likely to die ; or, if she did, he's not marketable now ; he's too old and too simple. Still, there's the boy :—there's the boy Paul. He's young and pliable yet : clay fresh to hand : you can make what you like of him. Well, I don't deny there was a touch of sentiment in it all ; for I love a title ; but I couldn't bear either to think of a good chance being thrown away—a chance of making money out of it, for him and for me ; for a title has always a value of its own, and it goes

against the grain with me to see a thing that has a value of its own thrown away, as it were, and let go to waste, for want of a little temporary employment.'

'To be sure,' his nephew assented with an acquiescent nod, for there he too could sympathize most fully.

'So the idea occurred to me,' Mr. Solomons went on, 'couldn't I lend those two people enough, on their own notes of hand—three, six, nine, twelve, renewable annually—to give the young man Paul a thorough good schooling, and send him to Oxford and make a gentleman of him?'

'But the security?' the younger man exclaimed impatiently—'the security? the security? Where's your collateral?'

Mr. Solomons shook his head with a very deliberate and sapient shake. 'There's securities and securities, Leo,' he said, 'and you don't understand but one particular kind of 'em. I'd as soon have Emery Gascoyne's paper as any landed gentleman's in all England. Anyhow, I made up my mind to do it, and I did it, Leo; that's the long and the short of it. I made 'em both

insure their lives—the Hand-in-Hand, a capital company—and I've paid the premiums ever since myself; here's the receipts, you see, for the last six years, as proper as proper.'

'You've paid the premiums yourself?' Lionel echoed with a cunning smile.

'But I've made 'em sign for 'em, of course,' his uncle continued hastily, 'I've made 'em sign for 'em. They've covered it all, and the bonuses go to increase the sum insured, which balances premiums almost. Here's the papers; here they are;' and he fumbled the bundle with eager fingers.

The nephew regarded them with pitying contempt. 'What's the good of all these?' he cried, turning them over sceptically. 'The fellow was a minor when he signed the lot. I dare say he's a minor still, if it comes to that. They've no legal value.'

'My dear,' the uncle went on with a very grave face, 'you think a great deal too much about what's legal, and a great deal too little about moral obligation, that keeps alive the

money-lending. Yes, he *was* a minor, and he's a minor still; but when he comes of age, you mark my words, he'll sign again for every penny of the money. He's a good boy, Paul, an honest boy, and sooner than let me lose a penny of my advances he'd work as my slave to his dying day—and him that 'll live to be a baronet of the United Kingdom. Besides,' Mr. Solomons continued more cheerfully, 'he knows I've done a great deal for him. He knows it's me that has made his fortune. I've sent him to school, and sent him to college, and made a gentleman of him. He knows he's got to behave fair and honest by me, as I've behaved by him. He knows he's got to look out for money. As soon as he's married, and married well, he'll pay me back every penny, principal and interest.'

'Suppose he don't marry well?' the nephew interposed with a provoking smile; 'suppose the heiress don't choose to take him?'

Mr. Solomons folded the notes of hand and other documents into a neat little

bundle, and tied them up once more with a dirty red tape, preparatory to locking them up in the safe in their accustomed pigeon-hole.

‘There’s more heiresses than one in the world,’ he said with a determined air. ‘If heiress number one won’t rise to the fly, heiress number two will swallow it, you warrant you. No, no, Leo; don’t you talk to me. A baronet’s worth his price in the market any day. Young women don’t get a *My Lady* for nothing, and Paul’s been taught exactly what he’s worth. He knows it’s a duty he owes to me and he owes to his father; that jointly and severally they’re bound to pay; and that to marry an heiress is the cheapest and easiest way to pay me.’

‘Her money’ll be all strictly tied up,’ the nephew exclaimed. ‘I know their way, these landed people, with their contracts and their settlements.’

‘A man of title can always dictate his own terms,’ the money-lender answered with more worldly wisdom; ‘at least, among the manufacturers. He can sell himself for as

much as he chooses somewhere and hang out for his price till they choose to pay it.'

Mr. Lionel gave a grunt of extreme dissatisfaction. 'Well, it's no business of mine, of course,' he observed in a distinct bad humour; 'but what I say is this: you'd got no right ever to begin upon it; it ain't legitimate trading; it's too precious speculative.'

His uncle glanced back at him with a reproachful look. 'There'll be enough for you without it, Leo,' he answered; 'any way, when I'm gone. It's all for you, you know very well, that I slave and hoard. And I only wish you were such a young man as Paul is. I take a sort of pride in him, I don't deny. I only wish I'd put you to college the same as him and made a gentleman of you.'

'There ain't much to be made out of going to college,' Mr. Lionel replied, picking his teeth with his penknife; 'at least, if you ain't going into business afterwards as a British baronet.'

'It's all for you, Leo,' Mr. Solomons repeated, rising to put back the papers in

their places. ‘And even if this turns out a bad speculation—which I don’t believe—there’ll be more than enough for you, anyhow, without it.’

CHAPTER IX.

TEMPTATION.

AT Mentone the sun continued to shine and the world to bask in the joy of his rays, in spite of the snow on Kent's Hill and the white fogs that enwrapped the county of Surrey. To Paul's great surprise, too, when once the dreaded secret was out, the burden of bearing it became infinitely lessened. He had shrunk with all the shyness of a sensitive nature from letting the loungers on the Promenade du Midi know the real truth about his false position. He thought they would find in it nothing but cause for veiled ridicule. But, as a matter of fact, on that very evening the indefatigable Armitage, pursuing his quest through every villa he knew in town, discovered at last in a friend's

library a copy of Debrett's invaluable work on the people whom one can really know, don't you know, in England. Turning over the pages with a triumphant hand, to put to rout and confusion this absurd scallywag with his cock-and-bull story about his fine relations, Armitage was fairly dumfounded to come upon the entry, 'GASCOYNE, SIR EMERY, 14th baronet,' followed by half a page of the usual profoundly interesting genealogical detail, and ending with the fine abrupt but concise information, '*Residence*, Plowden's Court, Hillborough, Surrey.'

The Plowden's Court of real life was a narrow entry off the main street of the sleepy little country town, but the Plowden's Court which these words naturally conjured up before Armitage's fancy, seen in such a connection, was a stately and dignified Elizabethan mansion, standing in its own grounds of heaven knows how many statute acres, and surrounded by garden, lawn, and park-lands.

Armitage rubbed his eyes in blank amazement. Was it possible, then, that the scallywag had spoken the truth? In spite

of all appearances to the contrary, was he really the heir to a baronetcy of Charles II.'s creation, and to the noblest estate in the county of Pembroke?

He glanced through the profoundly interesting genealogical details with a curious eye. Yes, that was all plain sailing enough. 'Succeeded his second cousin, Sir Emery Charles Emeric Gascoyne, 13th baronet, *vide infra*.' Armitage proceeded to *vide infra* accordingly, and noticed at once that the name of Paul seemed to alternate regularly throughout the list with the name of Emery as the distinctive mark of the Gascoyne baronetcy. So far, clearly, the scallywag's story seemed to hold together much better than he expected. And next as to the estates? Not a word said about them, to be sure; but then, the respected and esteemed Debrett deals only in exalted rank, and has nothing to say on such inferior subjects as filthy lucre. '*Residence*, Plowden's Court, Hillborough.' Fancy the scallywag coming, after all, from a baronial mansion in the county of Surrey!

Next day the entire little world of Men-

tone had duly digested the singular news that the unobtrusive Oxford undergraduate who had come out to the Riviera strictly *incog.*, as tutor to the blonde young man at the Continental, was really the heir to a baronetcy in disguise, and the scion of a distinguished Pembrokeshire family. And all the world remarked at once, with its usual acuteness, that, in spite of his shyness, they had said from the first Paul Gascoyne was a delightful young man and had most charming manners.

All the world, indeed, has always divined these things beforehand, and is immensely surprised at all the rest of the world's stupidity in not having perceived them.

Three days later, however, at the usual little conclave in the Jardin Public—'The School for Scandal,' Madame Ceriolo christened the particular corner affected by Armitage and his group of intimates—that ardent inquirer came down quite triumphant with a letter in his hand. 'After all,' he said, as he seated himself with a comprehensive nod on his favourite bench, 'it turns out the scallywag's nobody much. I've just

had a line from my friend Rimington at Hipsley, near Hillborough, and he says, though the lad's supposed to be heir to a baronetcy, his father's a fellow in a very small way of business (reasons of delicacy, he writes, prevent him from particularizing further) and not at all in society, or anything like it, in Surrey. It seems the grandfather of the present baronet was a very bad lot, a scapegrace of low habits, who consorted chiefly with grooms or stable-boys and married a milkmaid or something of the sort ; no doubt after circumstances which, as Herodotus says, it is not lawful to mention, after which he was very properly cut off by his papa, the baronet of the time, with the traditional shilling. With that modest capital as his whole start in life, the scallywag's ancestor set up in town ; and there his descendants, living on the change for the shilling, I suppose, went from bad to worse, till the present man has sunk practically to the level of the working classes. When old Sir Emery, whom I knew in Pembrokeshire, popped off the hooks, some six or seven years ago, he

entirely ignored this debased stock—they'd intermarried, meanwhile, with cooks or scullery-maids—and left the estates at Gascoyne Manor and elsewhere to a younger branch, who had always kept up their position as gentlemen. So the scallywag's papa's only a bare courtesy baronet after all : by birth and education the scallywag himself is—well, just what you'd expect him to be. Rimington says in a postscript, 'Armitage went on, glancing around him with an air of virtuous self-abnegation, 'he hopes I won't mention these facts to anyone, for young Gascoyne's sake ; so I'm sure I can count upon all of *you* not to breathe a word of it, or to let it make the very slightest difference in any way in your treatment of the scallywag.'

Madame Ceriolo, raising a pair of dove-like eyes, saw her chance to score a point. 'But he really *is* the heir to a baronetcy in spite of everything, you see,' she put in languidly. 'That's very satisfactory. When people who are born of noble blood happen to be poor or to be placed in any dependent position, other people often cast most un-

justifiable doubts upon the truth of what they say about their own families. I sympathize with Mr. Gascoyne,' and she glanced down with a meaning look at the countess's coronet engraved on the plain silver locket she wore at her bosom.

'He'll be a Sir, though, any way, won't he?' Isabel Boynton asked, going straight to the point with true American business perception.

'He'll be a Sir, any way, Miss Boyton,' Armitage retorted sharply. 'And he'll make his wife, when he catches one, into a real My Lady.'

'For my part,' Nea Blair put in with quiet firmness, 'I don't care a pin whether he's heir to a baronetcy or whether he's not. I take him for himself. I think he's a very nice, good, sensible young man, and, whoever his parents are, he's a born gentleman.'

'One of Nature's gentlemen!' Madame Ceriolo interjected lackadaisically, with a darted glance from her tortoiseshell eyeglasses at Armitage, who, playing with his button, and feeling the sense of the meeting was entirely with the scallywag, retired

gracefully upon a safe commonplace : 'After all, it doesn't so much matter what a man's father is, as what he is himself—except, of course, for purposes of probate.'

So, in the end, as it turned out, the world of Mentone agreed to accept Paul Gascoyne with a very good grace as a future baronet, and to invite him freely to the afternoon teas and mild 'at homes' which form the staple of its innocent invalidish entertainments. A baronet is a baronet, if it comes to that, be he more or less, as the lawyers would gracefully put it ; and a baronet's son who has been to Oxford, no matter how poor, has always a possible future open before him. Nay, more, the mere fact of the little mystery as to his origin, and the whispered story about the lady's-maid and the dubious grandmamma, added just a touch of romance to the whole affair, which made up in piquancy for whatever Paul lacked in exterior adornment. If there's anything odd about a man's antecedents (and still more about a woman's) it's a mere toss-up whether Society chooses to pet him or damn him. But when once Society has

made up its mind to accept him, it becomes forthwith a point of honour to stick up for him at all risks, and to see in him nothing but the most consummate virtues. The very oddity is held to constitute a distinction. In point of fact, accordingly, Paul Gascoyne became the fashion of Mentone. And having once attained that proud position, as the small tame lion of a provincial show, everybody, of course, discovered in him at once unsuspected mines of learning or talent, and agreed unanimously over five o'clock tea-tables that young Gascoyne was really a most charming and interesting person.

The consequence was that for the next six weeks Paul saw a good deal of society at Mentone—more, in fact, than he had ever seen of that commodity anywhere in his life before, and amongst it of Nea Blair and Isabel Boyton.

Nea he liked and admired immensely. And with good reason. For it was the very first time he had ever had the opportunity of meeting an educated English lady and conversing with her on equal terms about

subjects that both could alike discourse of. He was always flattered when Nea talked to him ; the subtle delight of finding one's self able to hold one's own fairly with a beautiful and clever woman moved him strangely. Hitherto he had only seen and admired such beings from afar. To stand face to face with Nea Blair, and find that she did not disdain to talk with him—nay, that she evidently preferred his society to Thistle-ton's or Armitage's—was to the shy young man from Plowden's Court a positive revelation of delight and gladness. It is to be feared that he even neglected Aristotle's Ethics, and his duty to Mr. Solomons, more than once, in his readiness to go where Nea Blair might possibly meet him. He paid for it afterwards in qualms of conscience, to be sure ; but as long as it lasted it was perfect bliss to him.

Not that he believed or knew he was falling in love with Nea. If that explanation of his mental phenomena had ever occurred to his honest soul, Paul would have felt that those mysterious Claims which weighed on him so heavily made it

quite necessary for him to see as little as possible of the fair enchantress. He knew he was bound by solemn bond and pact to Mr. Solomons to sell himself finally in the matrimonial market for hard cash to the highest bidder ; and though even then uncomfortable doubts as to the justice or morality of such a proceeding sometimes forced themselves obtrusively upon Paul's mind, while the day of sale seemed still so far off, he would nevertheless have shrunk from letting himself get entangled in any other bond which might prove adverse in the end to Mr. Solomons' fair chance of repayment. After all, he thought casuistically to himself, there was always a possibility that he might finally happen to fall in love with some nice girl who was also the heiress Mr. Solomons dreamed about ; and then, and in that case—but there he broke down. The nearer he drew to the actual fact and pact of marriage, the more repugnant did the whole wild scheme appear to him.

One sunny afternoon, a week or two later, the whole little coterie of the Rives d'Or had made an excursion together on to the

rocky hills that bound either side of the old mule-path to Castellar. When they reached the ridge where great rounded bosses of ice-worn sandstone form a huge hog's back overlooking the twin-valleys to right and left, they dispersed by twos and threes, as men and maidens will do, among the rosemary bushes and the scanty umbrella-pines, or sat down in groups upon the bare, smooth rocks, in full view of the sea and the jagged summit of the gigantic Berceau.

Paul found himself, quite unconsciously, wandering among the low lentisk scrub with Nea Blair, and, seating themselves at last on the edge of the slope, with the lemons gleaming yellow in the Carei Valley far below their feet, they discoursed together, as youth and maiden discourse, of heaven and earth, and fate and philosophy, but more particularly of their own two selves, with that profound interest which youth and a free heart always lend to that entrancing subject when discussed *à deux*, under the spreading shade of a romantic pine-tree.

‘And when you’ve taken your degree, what then?’ Nea asked with some eagerness,

after Paul had duly enlightened her mind as to the precise period of his Greats examination, and the chances for and against his obtaining a First in that arduous undertaking.

‘Well, then,’ Paul answered with some little embarrassment, ‘after that, I suppose, I must go in for a Fellowship.’

‘But if you get a Fellowship you won’t be able to marry, will you?’ Nea inquired with interest. ‘Haven’t they got some horribly barbarous rule at Oxford, that if a Fellow marries he must lose his position?’

‘No, no; not now,’ Paul answered, smiling. ‘“C’était autrefois ainsi, mais nous avons changé tout cela,” as Sganarelle says in the play. A Fellowship, now, is for a fixed period.’

‘Well, that’s well, anyhow,’ Nea went on, more easily. ‘I hope, Mr. Gascoyne, you’ll get your Fellowship.’

‘Thank you,’ Paul replied. ‘That’s very kind of you. But I’m ashamed of having bored you with all this talk about myself—the subject upon which, as somebody once

put it, "all men are fluent and none agreeable."

'The somebody was wrong, then,' Nea answered with decision. 'Whenever one meets an interesting individuality one wants to know as much as possible about it. Don't you think,' and she looked up at him with her charming smile, 'in our society, nowadays, we never really get to know half enough about one another?'

'I know nothing about Society,' Paul replied frankly. 'I've never been in it. I've had no chance. But I think—in as much of the world as I know, which is a very tiny world indeed—we do somehow seem to go round and round, like people in the maze at Hampton Court, and never get at the heart and core one of the other.'

Dangerous ground, dangerous ground, dear Paul, for Mr. Solomons' chance of recovering in full on that long investment.

Nea felt it so, perhaps, for she paused a moment, and examined a little pink rock-cistus that sprang from a cleft in the sandstone at her feet with unnecessarily close

attention for anyone who was not a professed botanist. Then she said suddenly, as if with a burst of inspiration :

‘ I shall be up in Oxford myself, I expect, next summer term. Mrs. Douglas, the wife of the Accadian professor—at Magdalen, you know—means to ask me up for the Eights or something.’

‘ That’ll be just delightful !’ Paul answered warmly. ‘ We shall have some chance then of really getting to know one another.’

‘ I always liked Oxford,’ Nea murmured, looking down, and half afraid the conversation was leading her too far.

‘ I just love every inch of it,’ Paul replied with fervour. ‘ But, then, I’ve much reason to be grateful to Oxford. I owe it everything.’

‘ You’ll live there when you’re a Fellow ?’ Nea asked, looking up again.

Paul hesitated a second, and pulled grasses in his turn.

‘ I’ve got to *get* my Fellowship first,’ he said with some reserve. ‘ And then—and then I suppose I must do something or other

to make some money. I have heavy Claims upon me.'

'Oh dear, what a pity!' Nea cried with genuine regret.

'Why so, Miss Blair?'

'Because it's so dreadful you should have to enter the world with Claims, whatever they may be, to clog you. If you were free to choose your own walk in life, you know, you might do such wonders.'

'I should *like* literature,' Paul went on, relapsing once more into that egoistic vein.

'But, of course, that's impossible.'

'Why impossible?' Nea asked quickly.

'Because nobody can make money at literature nowadays,' Paul answered with a sigh; 'and my circumstances are such that it's absolutely necessary, before everything else, I should make money, and make it quickly. I must sacrifice everything to my chance of making money.'

'I see,' Nea answered with a faint tinge of displeasure in her tone. And she thought to herself, 'Perhaps he means he must get rich so as to keep up the dignity of the title. If so, I'm really and truly sorry; for I

thought he had a great deal better stuff than that in him.'

'There are so many Claims I have to satisfy,' Paul went on in a low voice, as if answering her inmost unspoken thought. 'My time's not my own. It's Somebody Else's. I've mortgaged it all by anticipation.'

Nea gave a start.

'Then you're engaged,' she said, putting the obvious feminine interpretation upon his ambiguous sentence. (A woman reads everything by the light of her own world—courtship and marriage.)

'Oh no,' Paul answered, smiling. 'I didn't mean that, or anything like it. I wouldn't mind that. It was something much more serious. I start in life with a grave burden.'

CHAPTER X.

THE HEIRESS IS WILLING.

‘SAY, Mr. Gascoyne,’ Isabel Boyton exclaimed, catching him up, breathless, on the Promenade du Midi, one day in the last week of Paul’s stay at Mentone: ‘will you come and ride with us over to La Mortola to-morrow?’

‘I’m sorry,’ Paul answered, smiling at her free Pennsylvanian mode of address, ‘but I’ve no horse to ride upon.’

‘Oh, I don’t mean ride horseback,’ Isabel explained promptly; ‘momma and I have chartered a kahrriage—a break, I think you call it over here in Europe—and we’re taking a party of ladies and gentlemen across to see the gardens.’

‘I shall be delighted to go,’ Paul

answered truthfully — for Nea would be there, he knew, and he went accordingly.

At La Mortola, however, he soon found out that Miss Isabel meant to keep him all for herself, and, indeed, that she stuck to him with creditable persistence. This was a very new sensation for Paul, who had never before been made so much of ; but he accepted it as youth accepts almost everything—with the frank delight of a new experience.

And how charming it was, that drive across to La Mortola, with the hot southern afternoon sun beating full upon the hills, Bordighera gleaming white upon its seaward point, and Cap Martin behind bathed in broad floods of glorious sunshine ! How Grimaldi shone among its silvery olives ; how the spires of Mentone rose tall and slender in the glistening background ! At the deep dark gorge spanned by the Pont St. Louis, they crossed the frontier, and Paul found himself for the first time in his life on the soil of Italy. Past the Italian Custom-house and the old Saracen tower in Dr. Bennett's garden, they wound along

the ledge to the corner by La Mortola ; and then they skirted a deep rocky ravine, all in darkest shade, with green pines clambering up its steep sides, till they halted against a broken cliff near the summit. At last they reached those marvellous hanging gardens, hewn out of the bare rock, where feathery African palms and broad-leaved tropical vegetation bask in the hot sun as on their native deserts. There they descended and wandered about at will, for it was a 'free day,' and Isabel Boyton, taking possession of Paul, walked him off alone, with American coolness, to a seat that overhung the villa and the sea, with a view along the coast for a hundred miles from San Remo to Toulon.

'You go back next week,' she said at once, after an awkward pause, when Paul had found nothing more to say to her, for he talked far less freely with the heiress than with Nea Blair.

'Yes ; I go back next week,' Paul repeated vaguely.

'To Oxford ?'

'To Oxford.'

‘We shall miss you so at Mentone,’ the Pennsylvanian went on with genuine regret. ‘You see, we’re so shorthanded for gentlemen, ain’t we?’

‘You’re very kind,’ Paul murmured, much abashed by this frank remark. ‘But perhaps somebody else will come who’ll do as well—or better.’

‘What’s a good time to come and see Oxford in?’ Isabel asked abruptly, without heeding his remark, but gazing with a vacant expression seaward.

‘Summer term’s the best for visitors,’ Paul answered, taken aback. ‘I should say about the twentieth of May, for example.’

‘Perhaps I’ll fetch momma along and have a look at it then,’ the golden-haired American continued, playing nervously with her parasol. ‘We could have a good time at Oxford about May, could we?’

‘I’d do my best to help you enjoy yourself,’ Paul replied, as in duty bound, but with a sinking recollection that just about that precise date he would be straining every nerve for his final examination.

‘I call that real nice of you,’ Isabel answered, still poking her parasol into the ground by her side. ‘Will you take us about and show us the college, the same as we read about in “Tom Brown at Oxford”?’

‘The University’s changed a good deal since those days,’ Paul replied with a smile, ‘but I shall be glad to do whatever I can to make your visit a pleasant one. Though Thistleton,’ he added, after a short pause, ‘would be able to show you a great deal more about the place than I can.’

The Pennsylvanian brought back her clear blue eyes from space with a sudden flash upon him.

‘Why?’ she asked curtly.

‘Because he’s so much richer,’ Paul answered, boldly shaming the devil. ‘He’s a member of all the clubs and sports and everything. His father’s one of the wealthiest men in Sheffield.’

Isabel drew a face with her parasol on the gravel below. ‘I don’t care a pin for that,’ she answered shortly.

‘I suppose not. You’re so rich your-

self,' Paul retorted with a sigh. Then he turned the subject clumsily. 'These are lovely gardens.'

'My poppa could buy up a place like this with a month's income,' the young lady answered, refusing to follow the false trail. She said it, not with any vulgar, boastful air, but simply as if to put him in possession of the facts of the case. She wanted him to know her exact position.

'Why isn't he here with you?' Paul ventured to ask, just to keep the conversational ball rolling.

'Oh my!' Isabel exclaimed. 'What a question to ask! Why, he's got to stop home and mind the store, of course, like every other man, hasn't he?'

'He's in business, then?' Paul said, with a start of surprise.

'In my country,' Isabel answered gravely, 'it ain't respectable *not* to be in business. My poppa's the richest man in Philadelphia.' Then she looked down at her shoes and added once more, 'But I don't care a pin about money myself, for all that. What I care for is whether people are nice or not.'

And I like Mr. Thistleton well enough in a sort of way ; he's quite nice, of course, and there's nothing grubby about him. But he kind of don't take me.'

'No?' Paul said, feeling he was called upon to say something.

'No,' Isabel answered ; 'he don't,' and then relapsed into strange silence.

For a moment or two they sat with their eyes fixed on the ground, and neither spoke a single word to the other. Then Isabel began once more, just to encourage him a bit, for she misinterpreted his awkwardness and shyness—'It *is* a lovely place. I'm most inclined to make my poppa give up the States and come across to reside for a permanence in some elegant place like this in Europe.'

'Your father would come if you wished him, then?' Paul asked, all trembling with excitement, for he dimly suspected he was neglecting his duty (and Mr. Solomons' interests) in the most culpable manner.

Isabel noticed his tremulous voice, and answered in the softest tones she could command :

‘He’d do anything most to make me happy.’

‘Indeed,’ Paul replied, and gazed once more with a preoccupied air towards the distant Esterels. They came out so clear against the blue horizon.

‘Yes, poppa just spoils me,’ Isabel went on abstractedly ; ‘he’s a real good poppa. And how lovely it’d be to pass one’s life in a place like this, with all those glorious mountains and hills around one, and that elegant sea tumbling and shining right in front of one’s eye—with somebody that loved one.’

The running was getting uncomfortably hot now.

‘It would be delightful indeed,’ Paul echoed, very warm in the face, ‘if only one had got the money to do it with.’

Isabel waited a moment again with down-cast eyes ; but her neighbour seemed disinclined to continue the conversation. And to think he had the power to make any woman My Lady ! She paused and looked long at him. Then she rose at last with a stifled sigh. He was real nice, she thought,

this British baronet's son, and he trembled a good bit, and felt like proposing, but he couldn't just make up his mind right away on the spot to say what he wanted. English young men are so absurdly awkward.

'Well, we shall meet at Oxford, any way,' she said lightly, moving down towards the shore. 'Let's get along and see what those great red plants on the rocks are, Mr. Gascoyne. I expect by this time momma'll be looking out for me.'

Paul went home to the Continental that night with a terrible consciousness of neglected duty. Modest as he was, he couldn't even pretend to conceal from himself the obvious fact that the golden-haired Pennsylvanian had exhibited a marked preference for his conversation and society. He fancied she almost expected him to propose to her. And, indeed, the idea was not wholly of his own suggestion. Thistleton, when retailing the common gossip of the Promenade du Midi, had more than once announced his firm belief that Paul might have 'the Yankee girl for the asking.' And

Paul himself, much inclined to underrate his own powers of attraction, could not, nevertheless, deny in his own soul the patent evidences that Isabel Boyton, for all her wealth, was fully susceptible to the charms of a British baronetcy.

He stood at last face to face in earnest with a great Difficulty.

Could he or could he not carry out his Compact?

As he sat by himself in his room at the Continental that night, he thought it all over, how it had gradually grown up step by step from the very beginning. It seemed so natural, every bit of it, to him, who had grown up with it himself, as a sort of religion. So strange to anyone else who heard it only for the first time now as a completed transaction.

For six years past and more, his father and mother and Mr. Solomons—the three great authorities that framed his life for him—had impressed it upon him as the first article of his practical creed, that he was to grow up a gentleman and marry an heiress.

To us, what an ignoble aim it seems ! but on Paul it had always been enforced for years by all the sanctions of parental wisdom and commercial honesty as the supreme necessity. He was indebted to Mr. Solomons for his schooling, and his clothing, and his Oxford education ; and the way he was bound to repay Mr. Solomons was to follow instructions to the very letter and marry an heiress. His stock-in-trade in life was his prospective title, and he was to sell that commodity, in accordance with recognised commercial maxims, in the dearest market.

And yet, strange to say, Paul Gascoyne himself was not mercenary. He had passively accepted the *rôle* in life, as most young men passively accept the choice of a profession made for them by their parents, without thinking very much, one way or the other, as to either its morality or its feasibility. He was so young when Mr. Solomons first hit upon his grand scheme for utilizing the reversion to a British baronetcy—no more than fourteen—that he had got the idea thoroughly dinned into his

head long before he was able to recognise in all its naked hideousness the base and sordid side of that hateful compact. Solomons had supplied him with money from time to time—not liberally, to be sure, for he did not wish to make his *protégé* extravagant, but in sufficient quantities for the simple needs and wants of a scallywag; and Paul had accepted the money, giving in return his worthless notes of hand, as youth always accepts its livelihood from its accustomed purveyors, without much care or thought as to the right or wrong of the customary supplies.

And then there had been so much besides to distract his attention from the abstract question of the ethics of marriage. He was occupied so much with reading for the schools, and taking pupils in his spare time to help eke out his scanty income; for he felt deeply what a drain he had always made on the family resources, and how much his father was beginning to stand in need of a son's assistance in the management of his business. The question of the moment—the definite question then and

there before him at each instant of his life—the necessity for reading hard and taking a good degree, and the parallel necessity for living at Oxford as cheaply as even a scallywag could do it—had overshadowed and eclipsed that remoter question of the underlying morality of the whole transaction, which had been settled for him beforehand, as it were, by his father and Mr. Solomons.

Paul, in fact, was the inheritor of two arduous heritages—the barren baronetcy, and Mr. Solomons' Claims to principal and interest.

Till that evening, then, though qualms of conscience had now and then obtruded themselves, he had never fairly and squarely faced his supreme difficulty. But to-night, in the solitude of his room at the Continental, sitting by himself in the dark (so as not to waste his friend Thistleton's *bougies* at a franc apiece, hotel reckoning: for economy in small matters had long since become instinctive with him), he turned the matter over for the first time in his soul with the definite issue clearly before

him—could he or could he not ever conscientiously marry Isabel Boyton?

His whole soul within him revolted at once with a tempestuous *No*. Now that the chance for carrying Mr. Solomons' scheme into actual practice had finally arrived—nay, even had thrust itself bodily upon him—he felt at once the whole meanness and baseness of the entire arrangement. Not so far as Mr. Solomons and his father were concerned—of their wisdom and goodness he could hardly have permitted himself even now to entertain a doubt—but so far as his own execution of their plan was at issue, he realized that at once in its true colours.

It would be wickedly and grossly unjust to Isabel. And it would be doing violence at the same time to his own inner and better nature.

But then the Claims upon him? Those terrible notes of hand! He took out his pocket-book, lighted one candle, and totted them all up, sum by sum, at compound interest, as they stood there confessed, from the very first moment. School expenses,

tailor's bill, travelling, rooms and sundries ; all renewable yearly at twenty per cent., and all running on indefinitely for ever at a rapidly-growing rate. Premiums on policies, washing, books—good heavens ! how the totals appalled and staggered him ! If he worked his life long at any educated profession he would never be able to earn enough to clear off that deadly load of debt with which he started. He saw clearly before him two awful alternatives : either to hunt and capture his heiress, as originally designed—in spite of all his seething internal repugnance ; or else to play false to his father and Mr. Solomons—to whom he owed everything—by keeping his benefactor (as he had been taught to regard him) waiting for years perhaps for his full repayment.

Waiting for years indeed ! Why, at twenty per cent., renewable annually, the sum could never get paid at all. It would go on accumulating as long as he lived, bond behind bond, and remain when he died as a heritage of debt to whoever came after him.

Not that anybody would ever come after him at all, if it came to that ; for, as things then stood, he would never, never be able to marry. The baronetcy might revert to the remote cousin in Pembrokeshire.

And then, for one brief moment, Nea Blair's sweet face as she sat on the hill-side that day at Sant' Agnese flashed across Paul's mental vision as he blew out the candle once more in utter despair, and gave him one further internal qualm of conscience. Was it possible he was influenced in what he had just been thinking by any wicked *arrière pensée* as to Nea—that beautiful, impossible, unattainable Nea? He, who was nobody, to dream about her! In his inmost soul, he trusted not; for he felt how unworthy a thing it would be to betray his father, and Faith, and Mr. Solomons, and his duty, all for the sake of his own wicked personal likes and fancies. Whatever came, he would at least try to keep Nea out of his mind severely, and decide the question upon its own merits.

He would try to envisage it thus only to

himself. Dare he do this great wrong to Isabel Boyton?

Or to any other woman circumstanced like Isabel?

He would try to let it hinge on that, not on Nea.

For, after all, what was Nea to him or he to Nea? Six weeks before he had never seen her; and now—he realized with a pang to himself that he wouldn't like to think he should never again see Nea.

And all through the long sleepless night that followed, one truth kept breaking in upon him more clearly than ever: if he would, he might marry Isabel Boyton—and pay off Mr. Solomons without Isabel's ever missing those few paltry hundreds. To Isabel's poppa they were but a drop in the bucket: and yet to him, Paul Gascoyne, they were a millstone round his neck, an insupportable burden put upon him almost against his will before he had yet arrived at years of discretion.

CHAPTER XI.

BEHIND THE SCENES.

THREE days later Paul and his companion turned their backs on Mentone *en route* for England. Scallywag as he was, Paul had so far succeeded in interesting the little world of the Rives d'Or that Madame Ceriolo, and Nea Blair, and Isabel Boyton, and her momma, and even the great Armitage himself—the leader of the coterie—came down to the station to see him off. Armitage thought it was always well to fall in with the general opinion of society upon anybody or anything. But just before they bade their last adieus at the barrier, a tidy little Frenchwoman in a plain black dress pushed her way to the front with a bouquet in her hand of prodigious dimensions.

The Ceriolo recognised her in a moment again. It was that compromising little lady's-maid at the Iles Britanniques.

‘Comment c’est vous, Mademoiselle Clarice!’ Paul cried, taking her hand with perfect *empressement*, though he blushed a little before the faces of all his fine acquaintances. ‘How kind of you to come and see me off! I called last night at your hotel, but they told me you were engaged and couldn’t see me.’

‘Justement; je faisais la coiffure de Madame,’ Mademoiselle Clarice answered, unabashed by the presence of the Ceriolo and so much good society. ‘But, cher Monsieur Paul, I couldn’t let you go and leave Mentone sans vous serrer la main—moi qui vous ai connu quand vous étiez tout petit, tout petit, tout petit—mais tout petit comme ça, monsieur. And I do myself the pleasure of bringing you a bouquet for cette chère maman. You will make her my compliments, cette chère maman. Tell her it has been so delightful to see you again. It has recalled those so happy days at Hillborough.’

Paul took the big bouquet without any display of *mauvaise honte*, and thanked the voluble little Mademoiselle Clarice for it in French as fluent almost as her own. Mademoiselle Clarice had tears in her eyes. 'And to hear you talk that beautiful language,' she cried, 'cette belle langue que je vous ai enseignée moi-même—ah, que c'est charmant !' She stooped forward irresistibly, and kissed him on both cheeks. Mademoiselle Clarice was forty, but plump and well-preserved. Paul accepted the kisses with a very good grace, as well as the two hands with which she bid him farewell. 'And now I must run back,' she said ; 'I must run back this minute. Madame m'attend—elle s'empatiente tant, Madame !' And with another good kiss and two shakes of the hand she was gone ; and Paul was left standing alone by the barrier.

'What a strange creature !' Madame Ceriolo cried, putting up those long-handled tortoiseshell eyeglasses of hers and following the impressionable Frenchwoman with her stony glance as she left the station. 'Who

is she, Mr. Gascoyne, and how on earth did you ever come to know her ?

‘She’s an old friend of my mother’s,’ Paul answered once more, blurting out the whole simple truth ; ‘and she taught me French at Hillborough when I was a little chap, for she was lady’s-maid at a house where my father was coachman.’ And then without waiting to observe the effect of this painful Parthian shot, delivered trembling, he raised his hat, and bidding a comprehensive good-bye to all at once, took refuge with Thistleton behind the passengers’ barrier.

‘Goodness gracious !’ Madame Ceriolo cried, looking round with an astonished air of surprise to Armitage ; ‘did you ever in your life see anything so funny ? One would have thought the woman would have had good feeling and good sense enough not to inflict herself upon him in the present company. She may have been a friend of his mother’s, of course, and all that sort of thing ; but if she wanted to see him she should have gone to his hotel and seen him quietly. She ought to remember

that now he's heir to a baronetcy and a member of a university, and admitted as such into good society.' For since Mentone had decided upon adopting Paul, and therefore backed him up for every possible virtue, it had been Madame's cue to insist most strenuously upon the genealogical fact that wherever a person of noble race may happen to be born, or whatever position he may happen to fill, he retains his sixteen quarters of nobility intact for all that. This was one for Paul, and two for Madame Ceriolo.

'Why, I thought it was so nice of her,' Nea objected with her simple English tender-heartedness, 'to come down and see him off so simply before us all, and to bring him those flowers, and, in the simplicity of her heart, to fall on his neck and kiss him openly. Her eyes were quite full of tears, too. I'm sure, Madame Ceriolo, she's very fond of him.'

'Nea, my dear,' Madame Ceriolo remarked severely, with the precise smile of the British matron, 'your views are really quite revolutionary. There should be natural lines between the various classes.

People mustn't all get mixed up promiscuously. Even if she liked him, she shouldn't let her feelings get the better of her. She should always remember to keep her proper place, no matter what her private sentiments may prompt her to.'

And, indeed, in Madame Ceriolo's family they managed these things a great deal better.

For, as Nea and Madame Ceriolo were coming to Mentone that very autumn, a little episode had occurred in a coffee-room at Marseilles which may be here related, as flashing a ray of incidental light on the character of Madame Ceriolo's aristocratic antecedents.

They reached Marseilles late in the evening, and drove at once to the Hôtel du Louvre—it was part of Madame's cue that she knew the best and most luxurious hotel at every town in Europe—where they went down in their travelling dress to the restaurant for supper. As they entered, they found they had the room to themselves, and an obsequious waiter, in an irreproachable white tie and with a spotless napkin hanging gracefully on his arm, motioned

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them over without a word to a table near the fireplace. For the indivisible moment of time while they took their seats an observant spectator might just have noted a flash of recognition in Madame's eyes, and an answering flash that twinkled silently in the obsequious waiter's. But neither spoke a word of any sort to the other, save in the way of business. Madame took the *carte* that the waiter handed her, with a stifled yawn, and ordered an omelette and a bottle of Beaujolais with the same careless air with which she would have ordered it from any other young man in a similar position.

At the end of the supper, however, she sent Nea up to get her necessaries for the night unpacked, and waited down herself to ask a few questions, to make quite sure, she said, about the trains to-morrow.

As soon as Nea had left the room, the obsequious waiter approached a little nearer, and, still with his unequivocally respectful air and his spotless napkin hanging gracefully over his arm, stood evidently awaiting Madame Ceriolo's orders.

Madame eyed him a moment with a perfect calm through those aristocratic glasses, and then observed quietly, 'Tiens, c'est toi,' without moving at all from the position she occupied when Nea left her.

'Yes, it's me, Polly,' the irreproachable waiter answered, in his native English, straight and stiff as ever.

'I thought you were going to make the season at Pau this winter,' Madame Ceriolo remarked in an arid tone of voice, a little sour about the upper notes, and crumbling her bread with one hand uneasily.

'I was,' the irreproachable waiter replied, without moving a muscle, 'but I ain't now. The governor and me had a blow-up about terms. So I gave him the slip, and engaged on here—extra hand for the Riviera season.'

'You made the summer at Scheveningen, I think?' Madame Ceriolo remarked languidly, as one discusses the affairs of an indifferent acquaintance.

The irreproachable waiter bowed his stiff, official bow.

‘At the Hôtel des Anglais,’ he answered, in his unvarying hotel tone.

‘Good business?’

‘No; beastly. All Dutch and Germans. Them gentlemen button up their pockets too tight. If it hadn’t been for a family or two of English and Americans dropping in casual, the tips wouldn’t so much as have paid for my washing. Dickeys and cuffs come dear at Scheveningen.’

There was a slight pause. Then Madame Ceriolo spoke again.

‘Tom.’

‘Yes, Polly.’

‘Where’s Karl?’

‘With a variety troupe at Berlin, when I last heard from him.’

‘Doing well?’

‘Pretty well, I believe. Feathering his nest. But banjos ain’t anything like what they’d used to be. The line’s overstocked, that’s the long and the short of it.’

‘How’s mother?’ Madame Ceriolo asked carelessly.

‘Drunk,’ the irreproachable waiter re-

sponded, rearranging his tie. 'Drunk, *as usual.*'

'Still at the Dials?'

The waiter nodded. 'She can't go far from dear old Drury,' he answered vaguely.

'Well, I love the Lane myself,' Madame Ceriolo responded. 'It's a rare old place. I never was happier, Tom, in all my life, than in the days when I was on, long ago, in the pantomime.'

'You're on the quiet now, I see,' the waiter remarked, with a respectful inclination—in case anybody should happen to see him through the glass-doors that opened on to the corridor.

Madame Ceriolo bent her head. 'On the strict quiet,' she responded coldly.

'Governess?'

'Well, pretty much that sort of thing, you know. Companion. Chaperon.'

'To an English young lady, I gathered?'

'Yes. Clergyman's daughter.'

The waiter's face almost relaxed into a broad smile. 'Well, you always were a clever one, Polly!' he exclaimed, delighted.

Madame Ceriolo drew herself up very stiff, as one who prefers to discourage levity in the lower classes. 'I hope I know how to behave myself in whatever society I may happen to be placed,' she answered chillily.

'You do,' the waiter replied. 'You're a rare one at that. I wish I could make as much out of the French and German as you and Karl do. Mine's all thrown away—all waiters speak the lot. Say, though: what are you now—I mean in the way of name and nation?'

'*Toujours Ceriolo*,' Madame answered, with a quiet smile. 'After all, it's safer. If anybody who knew you before comes up and calls you by a different name when you've taken an *alias*, how awfully awkward! And really, if it comes to that, Ceriolo's as good a name for a person to own as any I could invent. It's suggestive of anything on earth but organ-grinding.'

For, in truth, Madame's father, the reputed Count, had really earned a precarious livelihood by the production of sweet music on that despised instrument.

The irreproachable waiter smiled an immaculate smile. ‘And are you Italian or what?’ he asked, always respectful.

‘Tyrolese,’ Madame answered carelessly : ‘it’s better so. Widow of a Count in the Austrian service. Mother an English-woman—which is true for once, you see—brought up in Vienna in the English Church by special agreement—to suit the clergyman.’

‘And how much are you going to stand me for my discreet silence?’ the waiter asked, coming half a step nearer, and assuming a less agreeable tone of countenance.

Madame pulled out ten francs from her dainty purse, and laid the coin gingerly on the edge of the table.

‘Won’t do,’ the waiter observed, shaking his head solemnly. ‘Not enough by a long way. Won’t do at all. When an affectionate brother meets his sister again, whom he hasn’t seen for more’n a twelve-month—and keeps her secrets—he can’t be put off with half a Napoleon. No, no, Polly ; you must stand me a sovereign.’

‘It’s an imposition,’ Madame Ceriolo remarked, growing very red in the face, but remembering even so to preserve her blindest tone, and drawing the sum in question unwillingly from her pocket. ‘Tom, I call it a perfect imposition.’

‘All right, my angel,’ the waiter replied calmly, slipping the coin at once into his pocket. ‘I’ve done as much more’n once before for you, Polly, when you were hard up ; and, after all, it ain’t often we meet now, is it, my chicken ?’

‘You’re rude and coarse,’ Madame Ceriolo answered, rising to go. ‘I wonder you dare to address me in such vulgar language.’

‘Well, considering you’re a countess, it *is* rather cheeky,’ the waiter replied, smiling, but still with the imperturbable attitude of the well-bred servant. ‘You see, Polly, we ain’t all like you. I wish we were ! We ain’t all learnt to speak the Queen’s English with ease and correctness from the elocution master at Drury.’

At that moment, before he could reveal any further items of domestic history, a

head appeared at the door, and the waiter, without altering a shade of his tone, continued respectfully in fluent French, 'Très bien, madame. The omnibus will be here to take down your luggage to the 11.40.'

All which will suggest to the intelligent reader's mind the fact that in Madame Ceriolo's family the distinctions of rank were duly observed, and that no member of that noble and well-bred house ever allowed his feelings of affection or of contempt, of anger or of laughter, to get the better at any time of his sober judgment.

But this had happened three months before the moment when Paul Gascoyne and Charlie Thistleton were seen out of the station, away down at Mentone, by Mademoiselle Clarice, the lady's maid.

CHAPTER XII.

A CHANCE ACQUAINTANCE.

WHILE Paul and his pupil were travelling north to Paris by the *train de luxe* (at the pupil's expense, of course—*bien entendu*), away over in England Faith Gascoyne was journeying homeward with a heavy heart and a parliamentary ticket by the slow train from Dorsetshire to Hillborough.

For Faith had managed to get away for her holiday to her mother's friends in a sheltered coastwise nook in the beloved West Country, where the sun had shone for her (by rare good luck) almost as brightly as on the Riviera, and where the breakers had whitened almost as blue a sea as that which shattered itself in shimmering spray upon the bold and broken rocks of La Mortola.

A delightful holiday indeed for poor hard-worked Faith, far from the alternate drudgery of school or home, and safe from the perpetual din and uproar of those joyous but all too effusively happy Infants. And now that short, peaceful interlude of rest and change was fairly over, and to-day Faith must return to her post at Hillborough in good time for the reopening of school, the day after to-morrow.

At the second station after she left Seaminster, Faith, who had hitherto enjoyed all to herself the commodious little wooden horsebox known as a third-class compartment on the Great Occidental Railway, was somewhat surprised to see the door of her carriage thrown open with a flourish by a footman in livery, and a middle-aged lady (for to Faith thirty-seven was already middle-age), far better dressed than the average of parliamentary passengers, seat herself with a quiet smile of polite recognition at the opposite window.

Faith's democratic back was set up at once by the lady's presumption in venturing to intrude her well-bred presence into a

parliamentary compartment. People who employ footmen in livery ought to herd with their equals in a well-padded first, instead of rudely thrusting themselves to spy out the manners and customs of their even Christians whose purses compel them to travel third in commodious horseboxes. Faith resented the intrusion as she resented the calls of the district-visitors who dropped in at all times and seasons to bestow good advice gratis upon herself and her mother, but would have been very much astonished if the cab-owner's wife had reciprocated the attention by sending in a card casually on their own 'at home' day. These *de haut en bas* civilities were not much to Faith's taste: she had too much self-respect and self-reverence herself to care either for obtruding on others or being herself obtruded upon.

But the lady settled herself down in her seat, and spoke with such unassuming and sprightly graciousness to Faith that even that national schoolmistress's proud heart was melted by degrees, and before the two had reached Wilmington Junction they

were hard at work in conversation with one another.

‘Dear me, where’s my lunch-basket?’ the lady said at last, looking round for the racks which did not exist in the commodious horsebox; ‘is it over your side, my dear?’

She said ‘my dear’ so simply and naturally that Faith could hardly find it in her heart to answer:

‘I think your footman—or, at least, the gentleman in tight silk stockings who saw you off—put it under the seat there.’

The lady laughed a good-natured laugh.

‘Oh, he’s not *my* footman,’ she answered, stooping down to look for it; ‘he belongs to some friends where I have been spending Christmas. It doesn’t run to footmen with *me*, I can assure you. If it did, I wouldn’t be travelling third this morning.’

‘No?’ Faith queried coldly.

‘No,’ the lady answered with a gentle but very decisive smile, ‘nor you either, if it comes to that. Nobody ever travels third by preference, so don’t pretend it. There are people who tell you they do, but then they’re snobs, and also untruthful.

They're afraid to say they do it for economy ; I'm not. I travel third because it's cheap. As Pooh-Bah says in the play, I do it but I don't like it. Now, say the truth yourself : wouldn't you, if you could, always travel first or second ?

'I never tried,' Faith answered evasively ;
'I've never had money enough.'

'Now, that's right !' the stranger exclaimed warmly, opening her lunch-basket and taking out some cold grouse and a flask of claret. 'That shows at once you have blue blood. I'm a great admirer of blue blood myself ; I firmly believe in it.'

'I don't precisely see what blue blood's got to do with the matter,' Faith answered, bewildered. 'I come from a little country town in Surrey, and I'm a national school-mistress.'

'Exactly,' the lady echoed. 'The very moment I set eyes on you I felt sure you had blue blood. I saw it in your wrists, and I wasn't mistaken. You mayn't know it, perhaps ; a great many people have got blue blood and aren't aware of it. But it's there, for all that, as blue as indigo ; and I,

who am a connoisseur in matters of blood, can always spot it ;' and she proceeded to take out from a dainty case a knife, fork, spoon, and a couple of drinking-glasses.

'But how did you spot it in me just now?' Faith asked with a smile, not wholly unflattered.

'Because you weren't ashamed to say you'd never travelled anything but third, and because you insisted then with unnecessary zeal on the smallness and humility of your own surroundings. Only blue blood ever does that. Everybody's descended from a duke on one side and a cobbler on the other. Snobs try always to bring forward their duke and conceal their cobbler. Blue blood's prouder and franker, too. It insists upon its cobbler being duly recognised.'

'Well, I'm not ashamed of mine; I'm proud of him,' Faith answered, colouring up; 'but all the same, I don't like blue blood. It's so hard and unfeeling. It makes me mad sometimes. You wouldn't believe how it keeps people waiting for their money.'

‘I’m sorry you don’t like it,’ the lady said, with the same soft smile as before and a bewitching look, ‘for then you won’t like me. I’m blue, very blue, as blue as the sky, and I don’t pretend to deny it. Will you take a little grouse and a glass of claret?’

‘Thank you,’ Faith answered coldly, flushing up once more; ‘I have my own lunch here in my own parcel.’

‘What have you got?’ the lady asked with the inquiring air of a profound *gourmet*.

‘Hard-boiled eggs and sandwiches,’ Faith said, half choking.

‘Well, Lady Seaminster didn’t give *me* any hard-boiled eggs,’ the lady said, searching in vain in her basket. ‘May I have one of yours? Let’s share our provisions.’

Faith could hardly say no, though she saw at once through the polite ruse; so she passed an egg to the lady with an ‘Oh, of course, I shall be delighted,’ and proceeded herself to eat a very dry sandwich.

‘Have some grouse,’ the lady said, passing her over a piece on a little electro-plated dish, ‘and a glass of claret.’

‘I’ve never tasted claret,’ Faith answered grimly ; ‘I don’t know if I’ll like it.’

‘All the better reason for trying it now,’ the lady replied, still cheerfully kind, in spite of rebuffs. ‘And so you thought that elegant gentleman in the silk stockings was *my* servant, did you ? What a capital joke ! But people at Oxford can’t afford to keep footmen in tights, you know. We’re as poor as church mice there—poor, but cultured.’

A flash of interest gleamed for a second in Faith’s eye at the mention of Oxford.

‘Oh, you live there, do you ?’ she said. ‘I should love to see Oxford.’

‘Yes, my husband’s professor of Accadian,’ the lady remarked ; ‘his name’s Douglas. But I dare say you don’t know what Accadian is. I didn’t, I’m sure, till I married Archie.’

A fuller flush came on Faith’s cheek. ‘I’ve heard of it from my brother,’ she said simply. ‘I think it was the language spoken in Assyria before the Assyrians went there, wasn’t it ? Ah yes, Paul told me so ! And I’ve heard him speak of your husband, too, I fancy.’

‘Have you a brother at Oxford, then?’ the lady asked with a start.

‘Yes, at Christ Church.’

‘Why, that’s Archie’s college,’ the lady went on, smiling. ‘What’s his name? I may know him.’

‘I don’t think so. His name’s Gascoyne.’

Mrs. Douglas fairly jumped with her triumph. ‘There! didn’t I tell you so?’ she cried, clapping her hands in her joy. ‘You *have* blue blood. It’s as clear as mud. Archie’s told me all about your brother. He’s poor but blue. I knew you were blue. Your father’s a baronet.’

Faith trembled all over at this sudden recognition. ‘Yes,’ she answered with some annoyance; ‘but he’s as poor as he can be. He’s a cab-driver too. I told you I wasn’t ashamed of my cobbler.’

‘And I told you I was sure you had blue blood,’ Mrs. Douglas echoed, delighted. ‘Now, this is quite too lovely, trying to pass yourself off for a *roturière* like that; but it’s no use with me. I see through these flimsy disguises always. Have some

more claret? it's not so bad, is it? And so you'd love to go to Oxford?

'Yes,' Faith faltered; 'Paul's told me so much about it.'

'Guard,' the lady cried as they stopped at a station, 'do we change here? Mind you tell us when we get to Hillborough Junction.'

She had enjoined this upon him already more than a dozen times since they started on their journey, and the guard was beginning to get a little tired of it.

'All right, mum,' he said in a testy voice; 'don't you be afeard. I'll see you all right. Jest you sit where you are until I come and tell you.'

'Why, that's where *I* have to change,' Faith observed as Mrs. Douglas withdrew her head from the window.

'Well, that's all right,' Mrs. Douglas replied with a cheery nod. 'Now we can have such a nice *tête-à-tête* together. You must tell me all about your brother and yourself. Do you know, my husband thinks your brother's awfully clever?'

She had found the right way to Faith's

heart at last. Thus adjured, Faith began to gossip with real goodwill about Paul, and her mother, and the business at Hillborough, and the life of a schoolmistress, and the trials she endured at the hands (and throats) of those unconscious Infants. She talked away more and more familiarly as the time went on till dusk set in, and the lamp in the horsebox alone was left to light them. Mrs. Douglas, in spite of her prejudice in favour of blue blood, was really sympathetic ; and by dexterous side-questions she drew out of Faith the inmost longings and troubles of her heart : how the local Hillborough grandees owed long bills which they wouldn't pay ; how Paul was cramped at Christ Church for want of money ; how her father was growing rheumatic and too old for his work ; how hard a time they often had in the winter ; how fond she was of Paul, and Paul of her ; how he had taught her in his holidays all he learnt himself ; how they two read Daudet and Victor Hugo together, and how she longed with all her heart and soul to be free from the indescribable bondage of

the Infants. Everything she told—Mrs. Douglas was so excellent and friendly a wielder of the pump—save that one hateful secret about Mr. Solomons. There Faith was always discreetly silent. She hated that horrible compact so thoroughly in her soul that she could never so much as bring herself to speak of it, even in the family circle.

They talked so long and talked so earnestly that they quite forgot about Hillborough Junction.

At last, as the clock was sounding seven, they arrived at a big and noisy station, where porters were shouting, and trains were puffing, and the electric light was fizzing and spluttering. Mrs. Douglas put her head out of the window once more, and called out to the guard, ‘Now, is this Hillborough Junction?’

The guard, with a righteously astonished air, cried back in reply, ‘Hillborough Junction? Why, what are you thinking of, mum? We passed Hillborough Junction a clear two hours ago.’

Faith looked at Mrs. Douglas, and Mrs.

Douglas looked at Faith. They stared in silence. Then the elder woman burst suddenly into a good-natured laugh. It was no use bullying that righteously-astonished guard. He was clearly expostulation-proof by long experience. 'When can we get a train back?' she asked instead with practical wisdom.

And the guard answered in the same business-like tone, 'You can't get no train back to-night at all; last's gone. You'll have to stop here till to-morrow morning.'

Mrs. Douglas laughed again; to her it was a mere adventure. The Lightbodys' carriage which was sent down to meet her would have to go back to the Rectory empty—that was all. But tears rushed up suddenly into poor Faith's eyes. To her it was nothing less than a grave misfortune.

'Oh, where can I go?' she cried, clasping her hands together nervously. 'And mother 'll be so dreadfully, dreadfully frightened!'

Mrs. Douglas's face grew somewhat graver. 'You must come with me to a hotel,' she answered kindly.

Faith looked back at her with eyes of genuine dismay.

‘I can’t,’ she murmured in a choking voice. ‘I—I couldn’t afford to go to any hotel where you’d go to.’

Mrs. Douglas took in the whole difficulty at a glance. ‘How much have you got with you, dear?’ she asked gently.

‘Four and sixpence,’ Faith answered with a terrible gulp. To her that was indeed a formidable sum to have to spend unexpectedly upon a night’s lodging.

‘If I were to lend you a few shillings——’ Mrs. Douglas began, but Faith shook her head.

‘That would be no use, thank you—thank you ever so much,’ she replied, gasping; ‘I couldn’t pay it back—I mean, I couldn’t afford to pay so much for—for a mistake of my own in not getting out at the right station.’

‘The mistake was mine,’ Mrs. Douglas said with prompt decision. ‘It was I who misled you. I ought to have asked.’ She hesitated for a moment. ‘There’s a good hotel here, I know,’ she began once more

timidly, 'if you'd only be so nice as to come there as my guest.'

But Faith shook her head still more vigorously than before.

'You're a dear, kind thing,' she cried, grasping her new friend's hand and pressing it warmly, 'and I'm ever so grateful. But I couldn't—I couldn't—oh no, I couldn't! It may be pride, and it may be the blood of the cobblers in me, I don't know which; but I never could do it—I really couldn't.'

Mrs. Douglas had tact enough to see at once she really meant it, and that nothing on earth would shake her firm resolve; so she paused a moment to collect her thoughts. Then she said once more, with that perfect good-humour which seemed never to desert her, 'Well, if that's so, my dear, there's no other way out of it. The mountain won't come to Mahomet, it appears, so I suppose Mahomet must go to the mountain. If *you* won't come to my hotel, my child, I'll just have to go and stop at *yours* to take care of you.'

Faith drew back with a little cry of deprecation. 'Oh no,' she exclaimed; 'I

could never let you do that, I'm sure, Mrs. Douglas.'

But on that point Mrs. Douglas was firm. The rock of the *convenances* on which she founded her plea could not have been more immovable in its fixity than herself. 'There are no two ways about it, my dear,' she said, after Faith had pleaded in vain every plea she knew to be let go alone to her own sort of lodging-house; 'the thing's impossible. I'm a married woman, and older than you, and I know all about it. A girl of your age—and a baronet's daughter, too—can't be permitted to go by herself to an inn or public-house, especially the sort of inn you seem to imply, without a married woman to guarantee her and chaperon her. As a Christian creature, I couldn't dream of allowing it. Why, that dear mother of yours would go out of her senses if she only knew you'd been passing the night alone in such a place without me to take care of you.' A thought seemed to strike her all at once. 'Stop here a second,' she said; 'I'll soon come back to you.'

Faith stopped on the platform by her

one small portmanteau for five minutes or more; and then Mrs. Douglas returned triumphant. 'This is what I've said,' she exclaimed, brandishing a piece of white paper all radiant before her: 'I've sent off a telegram: "Mrs. Douglas, Pendlebury, to Gascoyne, Plowden's Court, Hillborough, Surrey. Your daughter has missed her train, but is here and safe. Will return tomorrow. I am taking her to a respectable inn for the night. I am a friend of the Lightbodys, of Cheriton Rectory."'

'How did you know my address?' Faith gasped, astonished.

'My dear,' Mrs. Douglas replied, 'I happen to possess a pair of eyes. I read it on the label, there, on your portmanteau.'

'How much did it cost?' Faith cried, all aghast.

'I refuse to be questioned about my private correspondence,' Mrs. Douglas answered firmly. 'That's my affair. The telegram's mine, and sent in my own name. And now, dear, we've got to go out into the town and hunt about for our four-and-six-penny lodging.'

CHAPTER XIII.

BROTHER AND SISTER.

‘So what did you do, then?’ Paul asked two days later, as his sister and he sat hand-in-hand, comparing notes over their winter’s adventures.

‘So then,’ Faith went on, continuing her tale with unusual animation, ‘we ran about to two or three little places, to see which one would take us cheapest. And, Mrs. Douglas, oh, she’s a wonderful one at bargaining—you and I would never dare to do it. We wouldn’t have the face to beat people down so. “No,” she said, “that won’t suit *us*—we want bed and breakfast for half a crown,” and, you’ll hardly believe it, at last she got it.’

It was the luncheon-hour on the first

day of Faith's return to the slavery of the Infants ; but Faith had not gone home for her mid-day meal. She had got Paul to bring it out to her in her father's tin up to the Knoll, the heath-clad height that overhangs Hillborough, and from which the town derives its name. A little wooden summer-house, in form like a small Ionic temple, consisting only of a circular roof supported by heavy wooden columns, in the quaint bad taste of the eighteenth century, crowns the summit : and here, on that bright, frosty January morning, in spite of the cold, Faith preferred to eat her lunch undisturbed under the clear blue sky, in order to enjoy an uninterrupted interchange of confidences with her newly-returned brother. In the small houses of the labouring classes and the lesser *bourgeoisie* a *tête-à-tête* is impossible. People in that rank of life always go outdoors to say whatever they have most at heart to one another—a fact which explains much in their habits and manners whereat the unreflecting in the classes above them are apt to jeer beyond what is seemly. So,

brusque as was the change to Paul from the lemon-groves of Mentone to the bare boughs and leafless trunks of the beeches and chestnuts on the Knoll at Hillborough, he was glad to embrace that chance of out-pouring his soul to his one intimate friend and confidante, his sister, in the rococo summer-house on the open hill-top, rather than in the narrow little parlour at the ancestral abode of the Gascoyne family.

‘We couldn’t have done it ourselves,’ Paul mused in reply. ‘But that’s always the way with people who feel sure of their ground, Faith. They’ll bargain and haggle ten times as much over a shilling as we will. You see, they’re not afraid of losing caste by it.’

‘That’s just it,’ Faith went on. ‘She was as bold as brass about it. “Half a crown and not one penny more we pay,” she said, putting her little foot down smartly—just like this; “and we don’t want any supper; because, you see, Faith, you and I can sup in our own room, to save expense, off the remains of the sandwiches and the grouse and claret.”’

‘No! She didn’t say that out loud before their very faces?’ Paul exclaimed, aghast.

‘Yes, she did, before their very faces, my dear; and me there, just ready to drop at her side with shame and annoyance. But, Paul, she didn’t seem to care a pin. She was as high and mighty as if she’d ordered a private room, with champagne and turtle. She held up her head like a thorough lady, and made me feel quite bold myself, merely by dint of her good example.’

‘And you slept together?’ Paul asked.

‘And we slept together,’ Faith answered. ‘She said she didn’t mind a bit sharing the same room, though she would with some people, because I had blue blood—she was always talking that nonsense about blue blood, you know—and blue blood was akin all the world over. And I said I’d always understood, from the documents in the case, that mankind was made of one flesh, everywhere alike, no matter what might be the particular colour or quality of its circulating fluid; and for my part I didn’t care a brass farthing whether her blood was blue, or

pink, or yellow, or merely red like us common people's: for she was a dear, good thing, anyhow, and I liked her ever so. And then she took my face between her hands, like this, and kissed me so hard, and said, "Now we two are friends for good and always, so we'll talk no more nonsense about debatable questions." And, Paul, she's really such a sweet, kind soul, I could almost forgive her for being such a dreadful aristocrat. Why, do you know, she says she pays everybody weekly, and never kept even a washerwoman waiting for her money, not a fortnight in her life, nor wouldn't either!

'Well, you see, Faith,' Paul answered, musing, 'I expect the fact is, very often, they don't remember, and they've no idea what trouble they're causing. Perhaps we oughtn't to judge them too hardly.'

'I judge them hardly,' Faith cried, flushing up; 'and so would you, if you'd the bills to make up, and had to go round to their very doors to ask them for the money. But Mrs. Douglas, she's quite another sort—she's quite different. You

can't think how friendly we got together in that one evening. Though, to be sure, we lay awake the best part of the night, chattering away like a couple of magpies; and before morning we were much more intimate than I ever was with any other woman before in all my life. I think, perhaps——' And then Faith hesitated.

'You think, perhaps, it was because she was more like the sort of person you ought naturally to mix with,' Paul suggested gently, reading with his quick, sympathetic instinct her unuttered thought.

Faith faltered still. 'Well, perhaps so,' she said. 'More my equal—at least, in intelligence and feeling. Though I should be sorry to think, Paul,' she added after a pause, 'I had more in common with the class that keeps people waiting for their money than with dear, good, honest, hard-working souls like father and mother.'

'I don't think the classes need be mutually exclusive, as we say in logic,' Paul mused slowly. 'You see, I mix a good deal with both classes now; and it seems to

me there may be good and bad in both about equally.'

'Perhaps so. But the harm the one class does comes home to me, of course, a great deal more than the harm done by the other. They give me such a lot of bother about the bills: you wouldn't believe it. But Mrs. Douglas is a dear, I'm sure of that. She gave me *such* a kiss when she saw me off by the train next morning, and she said to me, "Now, remember, Faith dear, I expect you to come in summer term, and visit me at Oxford."'

'At Oxford?' Paul cried, with a start of short-lived pleasure.

'Oh yes, she was always going on about that the whole night through. She kept at it all the time: "You must come to Oxford." I'd happened to say to her earlier in the day, while we were in the train together, and before we got quite so intimate with one another, that I'd always had such a longing to see the University; and as soon as we'd begun to chum up a bit, you know, she said at once: "Next summer term you must come and visit me

at Oxford." But it couldn't be managed, of course,' Faith went on with a sigh. 'The thing's beyond us. Though I couldn't make her understand how utterly impossible it was.'

Paul's face fell. 'I suppose it *is* impossible,' he murmured, disappointed. 'You couldn't get the proper sort of clothes, I expect, to go and stop at Mrs. Douglas's, could you?'

'No,' Faith answered very decisively. 'I couldn't indeed. It may be wicked pride, but I'm woman enough to feel I won't go unless I can be dressed as well as all the others.'

'It's a dreadful thing, Faith,' Paul said, still holding her hand and looking away vaguely over the bare English landscape—so painful a contrast to the green of Mentone; 'it's a dreadful thing that I can't do anything in that way to help you. Now, any other brother, situated as I am, would be able to assist his sister a bit, and make her a little present of a dress and hat for such an occasion as that, for example. But I—I can't. Whatever I have is all

Mr. Solomons'. I can't spend a single penny unnecessarily on myself or you without doing a wrong to him and father and you and mother. There's that tenner, now, I got from Thistleton for coaching him : under any other circumstances, I'd be able to look upon that as my own to spend—I earned it myself—and to get you an evening dress (you'd want a simple evening dress, of course) to go to Oxford with. But I can't allow myself such a luxury as that. If I did, I'd have to get another tenner the more from Mr. Solomons, and sign for it at once, and burden my conscience, and father's, and yours, with another extra ten pounds, and all the interest.'

'I sometimes think,' Faith exclaimed petulantly, 'we should all have been a great deal happier in our lives if we'd never heard of that dreadful Mr. Solomons !'

Paul took a more judicial view of the situation, as became his sex.

'I sometimes think so, too,' he answered after a pause. 'But, then, you've got to remember, Faith, that we both of us are what we are now wholly and solely through

Mr. Solomons. We can't unthink so much of our past as to make ourselves mentally into what we might have been if Mr. Solomons had never at all crossed our horizon. We must recollect that if it hadn't been for Mr. Solomons I should never have gone either to the Grammar School or to Oxford. And if I'd never gone, you'd never have learnt all that you've learnt from me. You'd never even have become a teacher—now, would you? In a sort of way, Faith, you're now a lady, and I'm a gentleman. I know we are not what the big people at Hillborough would call gentlefolk; but in the only sense of the word that's worth anything we are; and that we are all depends upon Mr. Solomons. So being what we are, we can't say now what we would have wished things to be if we had been quite otherwise.'

'That's a trifle metaphysical,' Faith murmured, smiling. 'I don't feel sure I follow it. But perhaps, after all, on the whole, I agree with you.'

'Mr. Solomons is a factor you can't eliminate from our joint lives,' Paul went

on quietly ; ‘and if we could eliminate him, and all that he implies, we’d not be ourselves. We’d be Tom and Mary Whitehead, if you understand me.’

‘You might be Tom, but I’d not be Mary,’ Faith answered with a not unbecoming toss of her head, for the Whiteheads in point of fact were her pet aversion. ‘The difference there is something in the fibre. I suppose Mrs. Douglas would say it was blue blood ; but, anyhow, I believe I’m not quite made of the same stuff as she is.’

‘Why, there you’re as bad as Mrs. Douglas herself,’ Paul retorted, laughing. ‘Who was so precious democratic just now, I’d like to know, about all mankind and its varieties of circulating fluid ?’

Faith laughed in return, but withdrew her hand. We all of us object to the prejudices of others, but our own little prejudices are so much more sensible, so much more firmly grounded on reasonable distinctions ! We don’t like to have them too freely laughed at.

‘And this Yankee girl you were telling

us about last night,' Faith went on after a pause. 'Was she very nice? As nice as she was rich? And did you and she flirt desperately together?'

Paul's smiling face grew suddenly grave.

'Well, Faith,' he said, 'to tell you the truth—you may think it an awfully presumptuous thing for a fellow like me to say, but I really believe it—if I were to take pains about going the right way to work, I might get that Yankee girl to say *Yes* to me.'

'Most probably,' Faith answered, quite undiscomposed by this (to Paul) most startling announcement.

'You're laughing at me,' Paul cried, drawing back a little sharply. 'You think me a conceited prig for imagining it.'

'Not at all,' Faith replied, with supreme sisterly confidence in her brother's attractions. 'On the contrary, I should think nothing on earth could be more perfectly natural. There's no reason, that I can see, why you need be so absurdly modest about your own position. You're tall, you're strong, you're well built, you're good-looking,

and, though it's me that says it as oughtn't to say it, you're every inch a gentleman. You've been well educated ; you're an Oxford man, accustomed to mix with the best blood in England ; you're cleverer than anybody else I ever met ; and, last of all, you're the heir to a baronetcy. Heaven knows I'm the least likely person in the world to over-estimate the worth or importance of *that*—but, after all, it always counts for something. If all those combined attractions aren't enough to bring down the American girl on her knees, where, for goodness' sake, does she expect to find her complete Adonis ?

'I wish I felt half as confident about myself as you do about me,' Paul murmured, half ashamed.

'If you did, you wouldn't be half as nice as you are now, my dear. It's your diffidence that puts the *comble* on your perfections, as dear old Clarice would say. I'm so glad you saw her. She'd be so proud and delighted.'

'And yet it was awkward,' Paul said reflectively.

'I don't doubt it was awkward,' his sister

replied. 'It's always awkward to mix up your classes.'

'I'm not so much ashamed,' Paul went on with a sigh, 'as uncomfortable and doubtful. It isn't snobbishness, I think, that makes me feel so ; but, you see, you don't know how other people will treat them. And you hate having to be always obtruding on people whose whole ideas and sympathies and feelings are restricted to one class the fact that you yourself are just equally bound up with another. It seems like assuming a constant attitude of needless antagonism.'

'Is she pretty?' Faith put in abruptly, not heeding his explanation.

'Who? Clarice? As pretty as ever and not one day older.'

'I didn't mean *her*,' Faith interposed with a smile. 'I meant the other one—the American.'

'Oh, *her*! Yes, in her way, no doubt. Mignonne, slender, pallid, and golden-haired. She looks as if a breath would blow her away. Yet she's full of spirit, and cheek, and audacity, for all that. She said to me

herself one day, "I'm a little one, but, oh my!" and I'm sure she meant it. The man that marries her will have somebody to tackle.'

'And do you like her, Paul?'

Paul looked up in surprise—not at the words, but at the impressive, half-regretful way in which they were spoken.

'No,' he said. 'Faith, if you ask me point-blank, she's a nice little girl—pretty, and all that sort of thing; but I don't care for her.'

'And will you take pains about going the right way to make her say *Yes* to you?'

'Faith, how can you! I could never marry her. Rich as she is, and with all Mr. Solomons' bills at my back, I could never marry her.'

There was a minute's pause. Then Faith said again, looking up in his face:

'So the revolt has come. It's come at last. I've been waiting for it, and expecting it. For months and months I've been waiting and watching. You've found yourself face to face with the facts at last, and your

conscience is too strong for you. I knew it would be.'

'The revolt has come,' Paul answered with an effort. 'I found it out last week at Mentone, alone, and in my own mind it's all settled now. It's a terrible thing to have to say, Faith, and I've hardly worked out all it entails yet; but, come what may, I *can't* marry an heiress.'

Faith said nothing, but she rose from her seat, and putting her two hands to his warm, red cheeks, kissed him soundly with sisterly fervour.

'I know what it means, Paul,' she said, stooping over him tenderly. 'I know what a struggle it must have cost you to make up your mind—you on whom it's been enjoined as a sort of sacred duty for so many years past by father and Mr. Solomons. But I knew, when once you came to stand face to face with it, you'd see through the sham and dispel the illusion. You could never, never so sell yourself into slavery, and a helpless woman into gross degradation.'

'It will kill father whenever I have to tell him,' Paul murmured in return. 'It will

be the death-knell of all his hopes and ideals.'

'But you needn't tell him, at present at least,' Faith answered wisely. 'Put off the worst till you find it's inevitable. After all, it's only a guess that the American would take you. Most men don't marry at twenty-one. And you won't be twenty-one till to-morrow. You've years before you yet to make up your mind in. You can earn money meanwhile and repay it slowly. The disillusionment may come by slow degrees. There's no need to spring it upon him at one swoop, as you sprang it upon me unexpectedly this minute.'

'I can never earn it ; I can never repay it,' Paul answered despondently. 'It's far too heavy a weight for a man to begin life upon. I shall sink under the burden, but I shall never get rid of it.'

'Wait and see,' Faith answered. 'For the present, there's no need for saying anything. To-morrow Mr. Solomons will want you to sign your name afresh. But don't be foolish enough to tell him this. Why, goodness gracious, there's the bell ! I must

hurry down at once. And how cold it is up here on the hill-top !

Halfway down the slope she turned and spoke once more.

‘And the other girl,’ she said, ‘Nea Blair ? The English one ?’

‘She’s very, very nice,’ Paul answered with warmth. ‘She’s a really good girl. I like her immensely.’

‘Who is she ?’ Faith asked in a tremulous voice.

‘Her father’s a clergyman, somewhere down in Cornwall.’

‘I should hate her,’ Faith cried. ‘I know I should hate her. I never can bear grand girls like that. If this is one of that sort, I know I should hate her. The American I could stand—their ways are not our ways ; and we have the better of them in some things ; but an Englishwoman like that, I know I could never, never endure her.’

‘I’m sorry,’ Paul answered. And he looked at her tenderly.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE COMING OF AGE OF THE HEIR TO THE TITLE.

NEXT morning was Paul's twenty-first birthday. For that important occasion he had hurried home to England three days before his term at Oxford began ; for Mr. Solomons was anxious to bind him down firmly at the earliest possible moment to repay all the sums borrowed on his account by his father during his infancy, from the very beginning. To be sure, they had all been expended on necessities, and if the sturdy infant himself would not pay, it would always be possible to fall back upon his father. But, then, what use was that as a security ? Mr. Solomons asked himself. No, no ; he wanted Paul's own hand and seal to

all the documents hereinafter recapitulated, on the date of his coming of age, as a guarantee for future repayment.

The occasion, indeed, was celebrated in the Gascoyne household with all due solemnity. The baronet himself wore his Sunday best, with the carefully-brushed tall hat in which he always drove summer visitors to church in the Hillborough season; and at ten of the clock precisely he and Paul repaired, with a churchgoing air, as is the habit of their class (viewed not as a baronet, but as *petite bourgeoisie*) whenever a legal function has to be performed, to the dingy, stingy, gloomy-looking house where Mr. Solomons abode in the High Street of Hillborough.

Mr. Solomons, too, for his part, had risen in every way to the dignity of the occasion. He had to do business with a real live baronet and his eldest son; and he had prepared to receive his distinguished guests and clients with becoming hospitality. A decanter of brown sherry and a plate of plain cake stood upon the table by the dusty window of the estate agent's office; a bouquet of laurustinus and early-forced wallflowers adorned the one

vase on the wooden chimneypiece, and a fancy waistcoat of the most ornate design decorated Mr. Solomons' own portly person. Mr. Lionel, too, had come down from town to act as witness and general adviser, and to watch the case, so to speak, on his own behalf, as next-of-kin and heir-at-law to the person most interested in the whole proceeding. Mr. Lionel's hair was about as curly and as oleaginous as usual, but the flower in his buttonhole was even nobler in proportions than was his wont on week-days, and the perfume that exhaled from his silk pocket-handkerchief was more redolent than ever of that fervid musk which is dear to the Oriental nervous organization.

'Come in, Sir Emery,' Mr. Solomons observed, rubbing his hands with great unction, as the cab-driver paused for a second respectfully at his creditor's door. Mr. Solomons called his distinguished client plain Gascoyne on ordinary occasions when they met on terms of employer and cabman, but whenever these solemn functions of high finance had to be performed he allowed himself the inexpensive luxury of rolling that superfluous title

for a special treat on his appreciative palate as a connoisseur rolls a good glass of burgundy.

Paul grew hot in the face at the unwelcome sound—for to Paul that hateful baronetcy had grown into a perfect *bête noire*—but Sir Emery advanced by shuffling steps with a diffident air into the middle of the room, finding obvious difficulties as to the carriage of his hands, and then observed, in a very sheepish tone, as he bowed awkwardly:

‘Good-day, Mr. Solomons, sir. Fine mornin’, Mr. Lionel.’

‘It is a fine morning,’ Mr. Lionel condescended to observe in reply, with a distant nod; ‘but devilish cold, ain’t it?’ Then, extending his sleek white hand to Paul with a more gracious salute, ‘How de do, Gascoyne? Had a jolly time over yonder at Mentone?’

For Mr. Lionel never forgot that Paul Gascoyne had been to Oxford and was heir to a baronetcy, and that, therefore, social capital might, as likely as not, hereafter be made out of him.

‘Thank you,’ Paul answered, with a slight

inclination of his head and a marked tone of distaste ; ' I enjoyed myself very much on the Riviera. It's a beautiful place, and the people were so very kind to me.'

For Paul on his side had always a curious double feeling towards Lionel Solomons. On the one hand, he never forgot that Lionel was his uncle's nephew, and that once upon a time, when he played as a child in his father's yard, he used to regard Lionel as a very grand young gentleman indeed. And, on the other hand, he couldn't conceal from himself the patent fact, especially since he had mixed in the society of gentlemen on equal terms at Oxford, that Lionel Solomons was a peculiarly offensive kind of snob—the snob about town who thinks he knows a thing or two as to the world at large, and talks with glib familiarity about everyone everywhere whose name is bandied about in the shrill mouths of London gossip.

Mr. Solomons motioned Sir Emery graciously into a chair. ' Sit down, Paul,' he said, turning to his younger client. ' A glass of wine this cold morning, Sir Emery ?'

' I thank you kindly, sir,' the baronet

responded, taking it up as he spoke. ‘ ‘Ere’s your very good ‘ealth, Mr. Solomons, an’ my respex to Mr. Lionel.’

Mr. Solomons poured out a glass for Paul, and then two more, in solemn silence, for himself and his nephew. The drinking of wine has a sort of serious ceremonial importance with certain persons of Mr. Solomons’ character. After that he plunged for a while into general conversation on the atmospheric conditions and the meteorological probabilities for the immediate future—a subject which led round naturally by graceful steps to the political state of this kingdom, and the chances of a defeat for the existing Ministry over the Bill for the County Government of Dublin. Mr. Solomons considered it becoming on these state occasions not to start too abruptly on the question of business : a certain subdued delicacy of consideration for his clients’ feelings made him begin the interview on the broader and so to speak neutral basis of a meeting between gentlemen.

At last, however, when the sherry and the Ministry were both comfortably disposed

of, and Sir Emery had signified his satisfaction and acquiescence in either process, Mr. Solomons dexterously and gracefully introduced the real subject before the house with a small set speech. 'I think, Sir Emery,' he said, putting his square bullet-head a little on one side, 'you intimated just now that you wished to confer with me on a matter of business?'

'Yes, sir,' the cab-driver answered, growing suddenly hot, and speaking with a visible effort of eloquence. 'My son Paul, as you know, sir, have come of age to-day, and it's our desire, Mr. Solomons, if-so-be-as it's ekally convenient to you, to go together over them there little advances you've been kind enough to make from time to time for Paul's eddication, if I may so term it, an' to set 'em all right and straight, in the manner o' speakin', by givin' Paul's own acknowledgment for 'em, in black an' white, now he's no longer a minor but his own master.'

It was a great triumph for the British baronet to stumble through so long a sentence unhurt, without a single halt, or a

lapse of consciousness, and he felt justly proud when he got fairly to the end of it. Frequently as he had rehearsed it to himself in bed the night before, he never thought that when the moment for firing it off in actual practice really arrived he would have got pat through it all with such distinguished success.

Mr. Solomons smiled a smile of grateful recognition, and bowed, with one hand spread carelessly over his ample and expansive waistcoat. 'If I've been of any service to you and your son, Sir Emery,' he answered with humility, not untempered by conscious rectitude and the sense of a generous action well performed (at twenty per cent. interest, and incidentals) 'I'm more than repaid, I'm sure, for all my time and trouble.'

'And now,' Mr. Lionel remarked, with a curl of his full Oriental lips, under the budding moustache, 'let's get to business.'

To business Mr. Solomons thereupon at once addressed himself with congenial speed. He brought out from their pigeon-hole in the safe (with a decorous show of having to hunt for them first among his multifarious

papers, though he had put them handy before his client entered) the bundle of acknowledgments tied up in pink tape, and duly signed, sealed, and delivered by Paul and his father. 'These,' he said, unfolding them with studious care, and recapitulating them one by one, 'are the documents in the case. If you please, Mr. Paul'—he had never called him Mr. Paul before—but he was a free man now, and this was business, 'we'll go over them together, and check their correctness.'

'I have the figures all down here in my pocket-book,' Paul answered hastily, for he was anxious to shorten this unpleasant interview as much as possible; 'will you just glance at their numbers, and see if they're accurate?'

But Mr. Solomons was not to be so put off. For his part, indeed, he was quite otherwise minded. This ceremony was to him a vastly agreeable one, and he was anxious rather to prolong it, and to increase his sense of its deep importance by every conceivable legal detail in his power.

'Excuse me,' he said blandly, taking up the paper, and laying it open with ostentatious

scrupulousness. 'This is law, and we must be strictly lawyer-like. Will you kindly look over the contents of this document, and see whether it tallies with your recollection?'

Paul took it up and resigned himself with a sigh to the unpleasant ordeal. 'Quite right,' he answered, handing it back formally.

'Will you be so good as to initial it on the back, then, with date assigned?' Mr. Solomons asked.

Paul did as he was bid, in wondering silence.

Mr. Solomons took up the next in order, and then the third, and after that the fourth, and so on through all that hateful series of bills and renewals. Every item Paul acknowledged in solemn form, and each was duly handed over for inspection as he did so to Mr. Lionel, who also initialled them in his quality of witness.

At last the whole lot was fairly disposed of, and the dreadful total alone now stared Paul in the face with his blank insolvency. Then Mr. Solomons took from his desk yet another paper—this time a solemn document in due legal form, which he proceeded to

read aloud in a serious tone and with deep impressiveness. Of 'this indenture' and its contents Paul could only remember afterwards that it contained many allusions to Sir Emery Gascoyne, of Plowden's Court, Hillborough, in the County of Surrey, baronet, and Paul Gascoyne, of Christ Church, in the University of Oxford, gentleman, of the first part, as well as to Judah Prince Solomons, of High Street, Hillborough aforesaid, auctioneer and estate agent, of the second part; and that it purported to witness, with many unnecessary circumlocutions and subterfuges of the usual legal sort, to the simple fact that the two persons of the first part agreed and consented, jointly and severally, to pay the person of the second part a certain gross lump-sum, which, so far as human probability went, they had no sort of prospect or reasonable chance of ever paying. However, it was perfectly useless to say so to Mr. Solomons at that exact moment; for the pleasure which he derived from the perusal of the bond was too intense to permit the intervention of any other feeling.

So when the document had been duly read and digested, Paul took up the pen and did as he was bid, signing opposite a small red wafer on the face of the instrument, and then remarking, as he handed it back to Mr. Solomons, with his finger on the wafer, in accordance with instructions: 'I deliver this as my act and deed'—a sentence which seemed to afford the person of the second part the profoundest and most obviously heartfelt enjoyment.

And well it might indeed, for no loophole of escape was left to Paul and his father anywhere. They had bound themselves down, body and soul, to be Mr. Solomons' slaves and journeyman hands till they had paid him in full for every stiver of the amount to the uttermost farthing.

When all the other signing and witnessing had been done, and Paul had covenanted by solemn attestations never to plead infancy, error, or non-indebtedness, Mr. Solomons sighed a sigh of mingled regret and relief as he observed once more :

'And now, Paul, you owe the seven-and-six for the stamp, you'll notice.'

Paul pulled out his purse and paid the sum demanded without a passing murmur. He had been so long accustomed to these constant petty exactions that he took them now almost for granted, and hardly even reflected upon the curious fact that the sum in which he was now indebted amounted to more than double the original lump he had actually received, without counting these perpetual minor drawbacks.

Mr. Solomons folded up the document carefully, and replaced it in its pigeon-hole in the iron safe.

‘That finishes the past,’ he said ; ‘there we’ve got our security, Leo. And for the future, Mr. Paul, is there any temporary assistance you need just now to return to Oxford with?’

A terrible light burst across Paul’s soul. How on earth was he to live till he took his degree? Now that he had fully made up his mind that he couldn’t and wouldn’t marry an heiress, how could he go on accepting money from Mr. Solomons, which was really advanced on the remote security of that supposed contingency? Clearly, to

do so would be dishonest and unjust. And yet, if he didn't accept it, how could he ever take his degree at all? And if he didn't take his degree, how could he possibly hope to earn anything anywhere, either to keep himself alive or to repay Mr. Solomons?

Strange to say, this terrible dilemma had never before occurred to his youthful intelligence. He had to meet it and solve it off-hand now, without a single minute for consideration.

It would not have been surprising, with the training he had had, if Paul, accustomed to live upon Mr. Solomons' loans, as most young men live upon their fathers' resources, had salved his conscience by this clear plea of necessity, and had decided that to take his degree, anyhow, was of the first importance, both for himself and Mr. Solomons.

But he didn't. In an instant he had thought all these things over, and being now a man and a free agent, had decided in a flash what course of action his freedom imposed upon him.

With trembling lips he answered firmly :
' No, thank you, Mr. Solomons ; I've enough

in hand for my needs for the present.' And then he relapsed into troubled silence.

What followed he hardly noticed much. There was more political talk, and more sherry all round, with plum-cake accompaniment and serious faces. And then they rose to leave, Paul thinking to himself that now the crisis had come at last, and he could never return to his beloved Oxford. Those three years of his life would all be thrown away. He must miss his degree—and break his father's heart with the disappointment.

But Sir Emery observed, as he reached the open air, rubbing his hands together in the profundity of his admiration: 'E's a rare clever chap, to be sure, Mr. Solomons. Barr and Wilkie ain't nothin' by the side of him. Why, 'e read them documents out aloud so as no lawyer couldn't 'a drawed 'em up better.'

And Mr. Lionel, within, was observing to his uncle: 'Well, you *are* a simple one, and no mistake, to let that fellow Gascoyne see where you keep his acknowledgments! For my part, I wouldn't trust any man alive to know where I keep any papers of importance.'

CHAPTER XV.

COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY.

WHEN Paul got home, he put his dilemma, at lunch-time, before Faith, who went out with him once more on the Knoll to discuss it.

‘And what do you mean to do now?’ Faith asked, as soon as he’d finished outpouring his difficulties into her sympathetic ear. ‘Anyhow, you *must* go back to Oxford.’

‘I can’t,’ Paul answered shortly; ‘I’ve no money to go with.’

‘You’ve Thistleton’s tenner,’ Faith replied with simple straightforwardness, unconscious of the impropriety of such language on the lips of the female instructor of youth; for she had seen so little of

anybody but Paul, that Paul's phrases came naturally to the tip of her tongue whenever she discussed the things that pertain to men, and more especially to Oxford. 'That'll pay your way up and settle you in, at any rate.'

'But my battels!' Paul objected. 'I won't have anything to meet my battels with.'

Faith was too well up in University language not to be well aware by this time that 'battels' are the college charges for food, lodging, sundries, and tuition; so she made no bones about that technical phrase, but answered boldly :

'Well, the battels must take care of themselves; they won't be due till the beginning of next term, and meanwhile you can live on tick—as all the big people do at Hillborough—can't you?'

'Faith!' Paul cried, looking down into her face aghast. 'Et tu, Brute! You who always pitch into them so for not paying their little bills promptly!'

'Oh, I don't really mean *that*!' Faith answered, colouring up, and somewhat shocked herself at her own levity in

this fall from grace ; for, to Faith, the worst of all human sins was living on credit. ' I only meant—can't you try to get some more private pupils in the course of term-time, and stand your chance at the end of being able to pay your battels ?'

Paul reflected profoundly. ' It's a precious poor chance !' he responded with perfect frankness. ' There aren't many fellows who care to read nowadays with an undergraduate. And, besides, it spoils a man's own prospects for his examinations so much, if he has to go teaching and reading at once—driving two teams abreast, as learner and tutor.'

' It does,' Faith answered. ' That's obvious, of course. But, then, you've got to do something, you know, to keep the ball rolling.'

It's a great thing for a man to have an unpractical woman to spur him on. It makes him boldly attempt the impossible, So in the end, after much discussing of pros and cons between them, it was finally decided that Paul must go up to Oxford, as usual, and do his best to hang on some-

how for the present. If the worst came to the worst, as Faith put it succinctly, he must make a clean breast of it all to Mr. Solomons. But if not, he might manage by hook or by crook to earn enough money to pull through two terms; for in two terms more he would take his degree, and then he might really begin to work for money.

It was a desperate attempt—how desperate those only know who have themselves been through it. But Paul resolved to try, and the resolve itself had in it a gentle touch of the heroic.

Next day, in fact, he bade farewell to Faith and his mother, and returned with his ten-pound note to Oxford. Ten pounds is a slender provision for a term's expenses, but it would enable him at least to look about him for the moment, and see what chances arose of taking pupils.

And, indeed, that very night fortune favoured him, as it sometimes favours those forlorn hopes of workaday heroes. To his great surprise, Thistleton came round, after all, to his rooms, to ask if Paul would take

him on for the term as a private pupil. 'It's to read, this time,' he explained, with his usual frankness, 'not to satisfy the governor. I really must get through my Mods at last, and if I don't look sharp, I shall be ploughed again, and that'd set the governor's back up, so that he'd cut my allowance, for he won't stand my failing again, the governor won't, that's certain.' With great joy, therefore, Paul consented to take him on for the term, and so double that modest tenner.

Thistleton stopped talking long and late in his friend's rooms, and about twelve o'clock one of those confidential fits came over Paul, which are apt to come over young men, and others, when they sit up late into the small hours of the night over the smouldering embers of a dying fire. He had impressed upon Thistleton more than once already the absolute need for his making a little money, and his consequent desire to obtain pupils; and Thistleton in return had laughingly chaffed him about those mysterious claims to which Paul was always so vaguely alluding. Then Paul had waxed

more confidential and friendly still, and had imparted to Thistleton's sympathetic ear the fact that, if he didn't succeed in earning his own living for the next two terms, he would be obliged to leave Oxford without taking his degree at all, and so cut off all hope of making a livelihood in future and satisfying the mysterious claims in question. 'How so?' Thistleton asked; and Paul answered him in guarded phrase that his means of subsistence had since his return from Mentone been suddenly and quite unexpectedly cut from under him.

'What! The respected bart.'s not dead, is he?' the blonde young man asked, opening his big blue eyes as wide as he could open them.

Paul replied, with a somewhat forced smile, that the respected bart. still continued to walk this solid earth, and that his disappearance, indeed, from the mortal scene would have produced very little effect one way or the other upon his son's fortunes.

Then Thistleton grew more curious and inquisitive still, and Paul more confidential; till the end of it all was that Paul gradually

unfolded to his friend the whole of Mr. Solomons' scheme for his education and future life, with the financial details of yesterday's indenture, and the supposed way in which he was himself to discharge thereafter those serious obligations. When Thistleton heard the entire story he would have laughed outright had it not been for the obvious seriousness of Paul's dilemma. To borrow money on the strength of a prospective heiress unknown was really too ridiculous. But as soon as he began fully to grasp the whole absurd incident, its graver as well as its most comic aspects, his indignation got the better of his amusement at the episode. He declared roundly, in very plain terms, that Mr. Solomons, having taken Paul's life into his own hands while Paul was yet too young to know good from evil, and having brought Paul up like a gentleman, at Oxford, was clearly bound to see the thing through to the bitter end—at least, till Paul had taken his degree, and was, therefore, in a position to earn his own livelihood.

‘If I were you, Gascoyne,’ the blonde

young man asserted vigorously (with an unnecessary expletive, here suppressed), 'I wouldn't have the very slightest compunction in the world in taking his money for the next two terms, and then telling him right out he might whistle for his cash till you were able and ready to pay him back again. It's his own fault entirely if he's made a bad investment on a grotesque security. At least, that's how we'd look at the matter in Yorkshire.'

'I think,' Paul answered, with that gravity beyond his years that fate had forced upon him, 'if it were somebody else's case I was judging instead of my own, I should judge as you do, either in Yorkshire or elsewhere. I should say a fellow wasn't bound by acts imposed upon him, as it were, by his father or others, before he arrived at years of discretion. But then, when I was asked to sign those papers yesterday, if I was going to protest at all, that was the moment when I ought to have protested. I ought to have plainly said, "I'll sign for the money, if you'll go on finding me in ready cash till I take my degree; but, mind, I don't engage

to do anything in the world to catch an heiress." Only I hadn't the courage to say so then and there. You see, it's been made a sort of religious duty for me, through all my life, to marry for money; and if I'd blurted out my refusal point-blank like that, I'm afraid my father would have been grieved and annoyed at it.'

'I expect my governor's grieved and annoyed at a great many things I do,' Thistleton retorted with the unruffled philosophical calm of one-and-twenty—where others are concerned. 'It don't pay to be too tender to the feelings of fathers, you see; it gives them too high and mighty an idea of their own importance. Fathers in any case are apt to magnify their office overmuch, and it would never do for sons as well to pamper them. But, after all, I don't know why you need have spoken at all, nor why you shouldn't go on accepting this old buffer's assistance and support, with a quiet conscience, till you take your degree. When one looks it in the face, you don't know that you won't marry an heiress. Accidents *will* happen, you see, even in the best regulated

families. It's just as easy, if it comes to that, to fall in love with a girl with five thousand a year as with a girl who hasn't a penny to bless herself with. If the five thousand pounder's pretty and nice, like that Yankee at Mentone with the mamma in tow, I should say, on the whole, it's a great deal easier.'

'Not for me,' Paul answered, with the prompt fervour born of recent internal debate on this very question. 'I can understand that another fellow, who hadn't been brought up to look out for money, might fall in love with a girl with money quite as easily as with a girl without any. He has no prejudice one way or the other. But in my case it's different. The very fact that the money's been so much insisted upon for me, and that part of it would go to pay Mr. Solomons'—Paul never even thought of calling his creditor anything less respectful than 'Mr. Solomons' even to his nearest acquaintance—'would suffice to prevent me from falling in love with money. You see, falling in love's such a delicately balanced operation! If I married money

at all, it'd be simply and solely because I married for money, not because I fell in love with it; and I could never take any woman's money to pay the debt incurred beforehand for my own education. I should feel as if I'd sold myself to her, and was her absolute property.'

Thistleton stirred the fire meditatively with his friend's poker. 'It is awkward,' he admitted unwillingly—'devilish awkward, I allow. I say, Gascoyne, how much about does it cost you to live for a term here?'

'Oh, an awful lot of money,' Paul answered, much downcast, staring hard at the embers. 'Not much short of fifty pounds on an average.'

Thistleton looked across at him with a broad smile of surprise. 'Fifty pounds?' he echoed. 'You don't mean to say, my dear fellow, you manage to bring it down to fifty pounds, do you?'

'Well, for summer term especially I do, when there are no fires to keep up,' Paul answered soberly. 'But spring term comes rather heavy sometimes, I must say, because of the cold and extra clothing.'

Thistleton looked for some time at the fire, staring harder than ever with blank astonishment. 'Gascoyne,' he said at last in a very low tone, 'I'm clean ashamed of myself.'

'Why, my dear boy?'

'Because I spend at least five times as much as that on an average.'

'Ah, but then you've got five times as much to spend, you know. That makes all the difference.'

Thistleton paused and ruminated once more. How very unevenly things are arranged in this world! He was evidently thinking how he could word a difficult proposition for their partial readjustment. Then he spoke again. 'I could easily cut my own expenses down fifty quid this term,' he said, 'if you'd only let me lend it to you. I'm sure I wouldn't feel the loss in any way. The governor's behaved like a brick this winter.'

Paul shook his head. 'Impossible,' he answered with a despondent air. 'It's awfully good of you, Thistleton—awfully kind of you to think of it; but as things

stand, of course I couldn't dream of accepting it.'

'It wouldn't make the slightest difference in the world to me,' Thistleton went on persuasively. 'I assure you, Gascoyne, my governor 'd never feel or miss fifty pounds one way or the other.'

'Thank you ever so much,' Paul answered, with genuine gratitude. 'I know you mean every word you say, but I could never by any possibility take it, Thistleton.'

'Why not, my dear boy?' the blonde young man said, laying his hand on his friend's shoulder.

'Because, in the first place, it's your father's money, not yours, you propose to lend; and I couldn't accept it: but also in the second place, which is far more important, I haven't the very slightest chance of ever repaying you.'

'Repaying me!' Thistleton echoed with a crestfallen air. 'Oh, dash it all, Gascoyne, I never thought of your really repaying me, of course, you know. I meant it as an offer of pure accommodation.'

Paul laughed in spite of himself. 'That

sort of loan,' he said, taking his friend's hand in his and wringing it warmly, 'is usually called by another name. Seriously, Thistleton, I couldn't think of taking it from you. You see, I've no right to pay anybody else till I've repaid the last farthing I owe to Mr. Solomons: and to borrow money on the chance of repaying it at such a remote date—say somewhere about the Greek Kalends—would be downright robbery.'

A bright idea seized suddenly upon Thistleton. 'By Jove!' he cried, 'I'll tell you how we'll manage it. It's as easy as pap. You can't lose either way. You know that prize essay you were mugging away at all the time we were at Mentone—"The Influence of the Renaissance on Modern Thought," wasn't it?—ah, yes, I thought so. Well, how much would you get, now, if you happened to win it?'

'Fifty pounds,' Paul answered. 'But then, that's so very improbable.'

'Awfully improbable,' his friend echoed warmly, with profound conviction. 'That's just what I say. You haven't a chance.'

You ought to back yourself to lose, don't you see : that's the way to work it. I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll bet you ten to one in fivers you win. And you put a fiver on the chance you don't. Then—"don't you catch on?" as the Yankee girl used to say—you stand to come out pretty even either way. Suppose you get the prize, you earn fifty pounds, out of which you owe me a fiver—that leaves forty-five to the good, doesn't it? But suppose you lose, I owe you fifty. So, you see, you clear pretty nearly the same lot whichever turns up. I call that good hedging.' And the blonde young man leant back in his chair with a chuckle at his own ingenuity.

Paul smiled again. The blonde young man seemed so hugely delighted at the cleverness of his own device that he was really loath to be compelled to disillusion him. 'Your adroitness in trying to find a way to make me a present of fifty pounds under a transparent disguise really touches me,' he said with a faint tremor in his voice ; 'but don't think about it any more, you dear, good fellow. It's quite im-

possible. I must try to make it up myself with pupils and economy, and back my chances for the prize essay. If at the end of the term I'm still to the bad, I'll put the matter fairly before Mr. Solomons. Whether I stop up one term longer and take my degree or not must then depend upon what he thinks best for his own interest. After all, my whole future's mortgaged to him already, and it's more his affair than mine in the end what becomes of me.'

'Why, I call it downright slavery!' Thistleton exclaimed warmly. 'I think it ought to be prohibited by Act of Parliament. It's a great deal worse than the chimney boys and the indentured labourers. I only wish I'd got that beastly old Jew with his head in chancery here under my arm this very minute. By George, sir, wouldn't I just punch it as flat as a pancake in rather less than no time!'

'I think,' Paul answered with a smile, 'punching his head flat would do me very little permanent good. Indeed, in his own way he really means me well. He's bound

us down by all the terrors of the law to his percentages and his policies ; but I believe he considers himself my benefactor for all that.'

'Benefactor be blowed !' Thistleton responded, rising with North Country vehemence. 'If only I could see the old black-guard in college to-night, it'd give me the sincerest pleasure in life to kick him a dozen times round Tom Quad till he roared for mercy.'

CHAPTER XVI.

FORTUNE FAVOURS THE BRAVE.

IN spite of Paul's fears, however, that dreaded spring term went off most happily. To be sure, he had to work for his bread like a London cab-horse (as Sir Emery loved professionally to phrase it), but Paul had never been afraid of hard work, and as long as he could make both ends meet somehow, and avoid running into further debt with Mr. Solomons, he was amply satisfied. And that spring term he got as many pupils as he could possibly find time for. The reason for this sudden run upon his tutorial powers was, of course, the usual one which accounts for all successes and failures in life—a woman's wire-pulling. It is a mistake to think this world is mainly run by men.

Genius, talent, industry, capacity, nay even the invaluable quality of unscrupulousness itself, are as dust in the balance as a means to success compared with the silent, unobtrusive, backstairs influence of the feminine intelligence. A woman's wit is worth the whole lot of them.

And this valuable ally in the struggle for life Paul managed to secure almost without knowing it.

For two days after his return to The House (as Christ Church men insist upon calling their college) Paul received a little note from Faith's new friend, Mrs. Douglas, inviting him to drink afternoon tea at her house in the Parks—the fashionable tutorial suburb of modern married Oxford.

The Parks, in fact, which are the natural outcome of the married Fellow system, have completely revolutionized the Oxford we all knew and loved in our own callow undergraduate period. In those monastic ages the Fellow who married lost his Fellowship; the presence of women in the University was unknown; and even the stray intrusion of a sister or cousin into those stern gray

quads was severely frowned upon by ascetic authority. But nowadays, under the new petticoat *régime*, all that is changed : the Senior Tutor lives in a comfortable creeper-clad villa in the Parks ; his wife gives lunches and afternoon teas ; and his grown-up daughters play tennis with the men, and belong to the University just as much as the average undergraduate—or even in virtue of their fixity of tenure a little more so. Mrs. Senior Tutor (with marriageable girls) is quite as anxious to catch the eligible undergraduate for her own dance in Commemoration week as any Belgravian mamma in all London ; and the Rev. the Bursar himself smiles benignly while scholars and exhibitioners waste the shining hours in flirtation and punts on the banks of Cherwell. Things were not so ordered *Consule Planco*, when Leighton was Vice-Chancellor. But as everybody seems satisfied with the existing system — especially the Senior Tutor's daughters — there can be little doubt that all is for the best in the best of all possible Universities, and that flirting, so far from distracting the heads of students,

as the older school devoutly believed, is in reality a powerful spur on the mind of the youth to the acquisition of classical and mathematical knowledge.

To this new microcosm of the Parks and their inhabitants, Mrs. Douglas played the part of centre of gravity. Round her as primary the lesser orbs of that little system revolved in their various subordinate places. Not that Mrs. Douglas herself was either rich or pretentious. The Accadian professor's stipend consisted of the modest interest on a sum in Reduced Two-and-three-quarters per Cent. Consols, which he supplemented only by private means of the smallest, and by a very moderate income from his wife's family. But Mrs. Douglas had the invaluable quality of being able to 'hold her *salon*'; and being besides an earl's niece, she had rapidly grown into the principal wire-puller and recognised leader of Oxford tutorial society. With that greater world where the heads of houses move serene in placid orbits, indeed, she interfered but little; but the Parks acknowledged her sway without a murmur, as the

representative of authority in its most benign avatar. For Mrs. Douglas had tact, sense, and kindness ; she was truly sympathetic to a very high degree, and she would put herself out to serve a friend in a way that was sure to attract the friend's warmest gratitude. Moreover, she was a woman, and therefore skilled in the feminine art of mounting the back-stairs with address and good-humour. This combination of qualities made her justly loved and admired in Oxford by all save those unfortunate people whom her kindly machinations often succeeded in keeping out of posts for which they possessed every qualification on earth except the one needful one of Mrs. Douglas's friendship. But drawbacks like this are, of course, incidental to every possible system of 'influence' in government.

Now, things had made this powerful and good-natured lady particularly anxious to know and serve Paul Gascoyne. In the first place, she had been deeply interested in his sister Faith, whose curious character had engaged her sympathy at once, and with whom their one night at the country

hotel together had made her suddenly quite intimate. In the second place, on her return to Oxford, she had found a letter awaiting her from Nea Blair, her little Cornish friend, which contained some casual mention of a certain charming Christ Church man, a Mr. Gascoyne, who had created quite a puzzle for Mentone society by his singular mixture of pride and humility. Well, if Mrs. Douglas *had* a fault, it was that of taking too profound an interest in the fancies and fortunes of young people generally. Her husband, indeed, was wont to aver that, after Bryant and May, she was the greatest matchmaker in all England. Something in Nea Blair's letter—some mere undertone of feeling, that only a clever woman would ever have guessed at—suggested to Mrs. Douglas's quick instincts the idea that Nea Blair was more than commonly interested in Paul Gascoyne's personality and prospects. That alone would have been enough to make Mrs. Douglas anxious to meet and know Paul, the accident of her chance acquaintance with Faith in the commodious

horse-box made her doubly anxious to be of use and service to him.

So when Paul duly presented himself at the eligible creeper-clad villa in the Parks, to drink tea with the wife of the Accadian professor, Mrs. Douglas drew out of him by dexterous side-pressure the salient fact that he was anxious to find private pupils, or otherwise to increase his scanty income. And having once arrived at a knowledge of that fact, Mrs. Douglas made it her business in life for the next ten days to scour all Oxford in search of men who wanted to read for Mods with a private tutor, going out into the very highways and by-ways of the University, so to speak, and compelling them to come in with truly Biblical fortitude. But when once Mrs. Douglas took a thing in hand, it was well beknown to the Chancellor, masters, and scholars of the University of Oxford that, sooner or later, she meant to get it done, and that the Chancellor, masters, and scholars aforesaid might, therefore, just as well give in at once, without unnecessary trouble, bother, or expense, and let her have her way as soon

as she asked for it. 'Going in for Mods in June?' Mrs. Douglas would remark, with a sigh of pity, to the unhappy undergraduate of limited brains, fixing her mild brown eyes upon him with an air of the profoundest sympathy and friendly assistance. 'Then you'll want to read up your books this term with a private coach or somebody, *of course*'; and when the unhappy undergraduate of limited brains, falling readily into the trap thus baited for his destruction, admitted abstractly, in a general way, that a little tutorial assistance of a friendly sort would, perhaps, be not wholly unsuited to his intellectual needs, Mrs. Douglas, fixing her mild brown eye still more firmly than ever upon his trembling face, would nail him to his admission at once by responding cheerfully, 'Then I know the very man that'll suit your book just down to the ground. Mr. Gascoyne of Christ Church has a great many pupils reading with him this term, but I dare say I could induce him to make room for you somehow. My husband thinks very highly of Mr. Gascoyne. He's

a capital coach. If you want to get through with flying colours, he's just the right man to pull you out of the moderator's clutches. That's his card in my basket there ; don't forget the name : " Gascoyne of Christ Church, first pair right, number six, Peckwater." Yes, one of the great Gascoyne people down in Pembrokeshire—that's the very family. I'm glad you know them. His father's the present baronet, I believe, and his sister's coming up to see me next Commemoration. If you like, you can take his card to remember the name by—and when Mr. Gascoyne comes again on Sunday, I'll make a point of asking him whether you've been to call upon him about reading for Mods or not, and I'll tell him (as you're a most particular friend of mine) to be sure to pay you every possible attention.'

When a clever and good-looking woman of thirty-five, who happens to be also a professor's wife, flings herself upon an unhappy undergraduate of limited brains in that dashing fashion, with a smile that might soften the heart of a stone, what on earth can the unhappy undergraduate do in

self-defence but call at once upon Gascoyne of Christ Church, and gratefully receive his valuable instructions? Whence it resulted that, at the end of a fortnight, Gascoyne of Christ Church had as many pupils as he could easily manage (at ten pounds a head), and saw his way clearly to that term's expenses, about which he had so despaired a few days before with Faith at Hillborough. A woman of Mrs. Douglas's type is the most useful ally a man can find in life. Make friends with her, young man, wherever met; and be sure she will be worth to you a great deal more than many hundred men at the head of your profession.

One further feat of Mrs. Douglas's the candid historian blushes to repeat, yet, in the interest of truth, it must needs be recorded.

For when, a fortnight later, Mrs. Douglas gave her first dinner-party of the term, she took occasion, in the drawing-room, about ten of the clock, to draw aside the Senior Proctor confidentially for a moment, and murmur in his ear: 'I think, Mr. Wayles,

you're one of the examiners for the Marlborough Historical Essay, aren't you ?

The Senior Proctor, a grim, close-shaven man, with firm-set lips and a very clerical mouth and collar, signified his assent by a slight bow of acquiescence, and a murmured reply of 'I believe my office entails upon me that among other honours.'

Mrs. Douglas assumed her most bewitching smile. 'Now, dear Mr. Wayles,' she said, bending over towards him coquetishly, 'you mustn't really be angry with me. I'm only a woman, you know, and we women have always our little plots and conspiracies on hand, haven't we ? I'm very much interested in a particular essay which bears for motto the words, "Non jam prima peto Mnestheus neque vincere certo, Quanquam O !" There, you see, though I was dragged up before Girton and Newnham were invented, you didn't know before I could spout out a Latin hexameter as pat as that, did you ? Well, I want you *most particularly* to read over that identical essay with special attention, *very special* attention, and if you find it in *every* respect

immensely better than *all* the rest put together, to recommend it to the kind attention of your colleagues.'

The Senior Proctor—that grim, close-shaven man—allowed just the faintest ghost of a smile of amused pity to pucker the corners of his very clerical mouth as he answered with official succinctness, '*Every* essay alike, my dear Mrs. Douglas, will receive at my hands, and I believe I may venture to say at those of my brother-examiners also, the most impartial consideration; and nothing that can be said to us by any outside person—even yourself—can have the very *slightest* influence upon us in making our award to the most deserving competitor.'

'Oh, of course,' Mrs. Douglas answered, with that most bewitching smile once more well to the front. 'I know and understand all that *perfectly*. I haven't lived so long in the University as dear Archie's wife without having learnt how *absolutely useless* it is to try to pull any wires or go up any backstairs in University business. I only meant to say *if* you find that essay

quite undeniably the very best, I hope you won't let the fact of my recommendation tell strongly against it.'

The Senior Proctor had an uncomfortable sense that when Mrs. Douglas laid so profound a stress upon the words 'absolutely useless' that irreverent little woman was actually trying to chaff him or to laugh in her sleeve; and as the Senior Proctor represents before the world the dignity and majesty of the University in its corporate capacity, so wicked an attempt on her part to poke fun at his office would, no doubt, have merited condign punishment. But he only bowed once more a sphinxlike bow, and answered severely, '*All* the essays alike shall have my best attention.'

Now, we all of us know, of course—we who are men and women of the world—that the Senior Proctor spoke the exact truth, and that in matters so important as University prizes no shadow of partiality can ever be suspected among English gentlemen. (If it were, we might all be tempted to think that English gentlemen were not, after all, so very superior in kind

as we know them to be to the members of every other European nationality.) Nevertheless, it must be noted as a singular and unaccountable historical fact that when the Senior Proctor—that lone, bachelor man—went home that night along the cold, gray streets to his solitary rooms in Fellows Quad, Merton, and saw a big bundle of Marlborough prize essays lying on his table unopened for his deep consideration, his mouth relaxed for a moment into a distinctly human smile as he thought of the delicate pressure of her hand with which Mrs. Douglas—charming woman, to be sure, Mrs. Douglas!—had bid him good-night, with a last whispered adieu of ‘Now, don’t forget, Mr. Wayles: “Non jam primo peto Mnestheus neque vincere certo.”’ How delicious Virgil sounded, to be sure, on those ripe red lips! Had she learnt that verse by heart, he wondered, on purpose to bamboozle him? So thinking, and gloating over that dainty pressure, the Senior Proctor flung himself into his easy-chair, before his goodly fire, kicked off his boots and endued himself in his warm,

woollen-lined slippers, fortified his intellect with a brandy-and-soda from the syphon at his side, lighted one of Bacon's best cigars, and proceeded, with his feet on the fender comfortably, to address his soul in indulgent mood to the task of literary and historical criticism.

But, strange to say, he did *not* take up the very first essay that came to hand, as a conscientious Senior Proctor might fairly be expected to do. On the contrary, he turned them all over one by one with deliberative finger till he came to a roll of neat white foolscap, legibly inscribed in a bold, black hand—I blush to narrate it—with that very Virgilian motto which treacherous Mrs. Douglas had been at such pains to get by rote, without one false quantity, and to fire off, unappalled, against his grim clerical mouth and collar. He read the essay through first with close attention; then he wrote down on a small sheet of paper at his side the mystic letters ‘v. g.,’ supposed to stand for ‘very good’ in our own vernacular. By the time he had read it through, the hour was advanced, and a second brandy-

and-soda and a second cigar were needed to stimulate the critical faculty. As time went on, it must be frankly admitted, those essays got shorter and shorter shrift, while the soda got deeper and deeper doses of brandy, until by the time the clock marked three, the Senior Proctor rose up with dignity, drained the remainder of his last tall tumbler, and, sticking all the papers in his desk for read, strolled off to his bedroom unmistakably sleepy.

Now, it must not be concluded from this veracious account that Paul Gascoyne's essay was not in all probability, on its own merits, the very best of the entire lot submitted for judgment, nor that Mrs. Douglas had exerted on its behalf anything which could be described by the most severe moralist as undue influence. In fact, have we not already recorded the Senior Proctor's emphatic and deliberate assertion to the contrary? And was not that assertion again renewed? For when a fortnight later Mrs. Douglas ventured to thank the dignitary in question (as she irreverently phrased it), 'for backing her man for the Marlborough

Prize,' the Senior Proctor, opening his eyes wide in his very grimmest fashion, replied with an innocent air of surprise :

' Oh, so the successful candidate was the person you spoke about, Mrs. Douglas, was he ? Well, I'm sure we had none of us the very faintest idea of it.'

But, nevertheless, it is a historical fact not to be blinked, that when the Senior Proctor passed on the papers to his brother examiners for consideration, Paul Gascoyne's essay went on top, marked in plain words, ' Optime meritis est.—P. H. W.' and it is equally certain that the other examiners, glancing hastily over them with an uncritical eye, one and all endorsed Mr. Wayles' opinion. From which facts it may be gathered that, though Paul Gascoyne's Marlborough Essay was really and truly one of the most brilliant ever submitted to the Board of Examiners, and though favouritism of any kind is unknown at Oxford, it is none the less a very useful thing to have a Mrs. Douglas of your own on hand, to say a good word for you whenever convenient.

But Paul had no idea of all these hidden

springs of action in the Senior Proctor and his esteemed colleagues when a week or so before the end of term he read, all trembling, a notice posted on the door of the schools :

‘ The Board of Examiners for the Marlborough Historical Essay, Chichele Foundation, have awarded the Prize of Fifty Guineas to Paul Gascoyne, Commoner of Christ Church.’

His heart beat high as he read those words, and his knees reeled under him. So next term, at least, was safe from Mr. Solomons !

END OF VOL. I.

[April, 1893.]



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